4 PART MINI-SERIES

DON McGREGOR GENE COLAN

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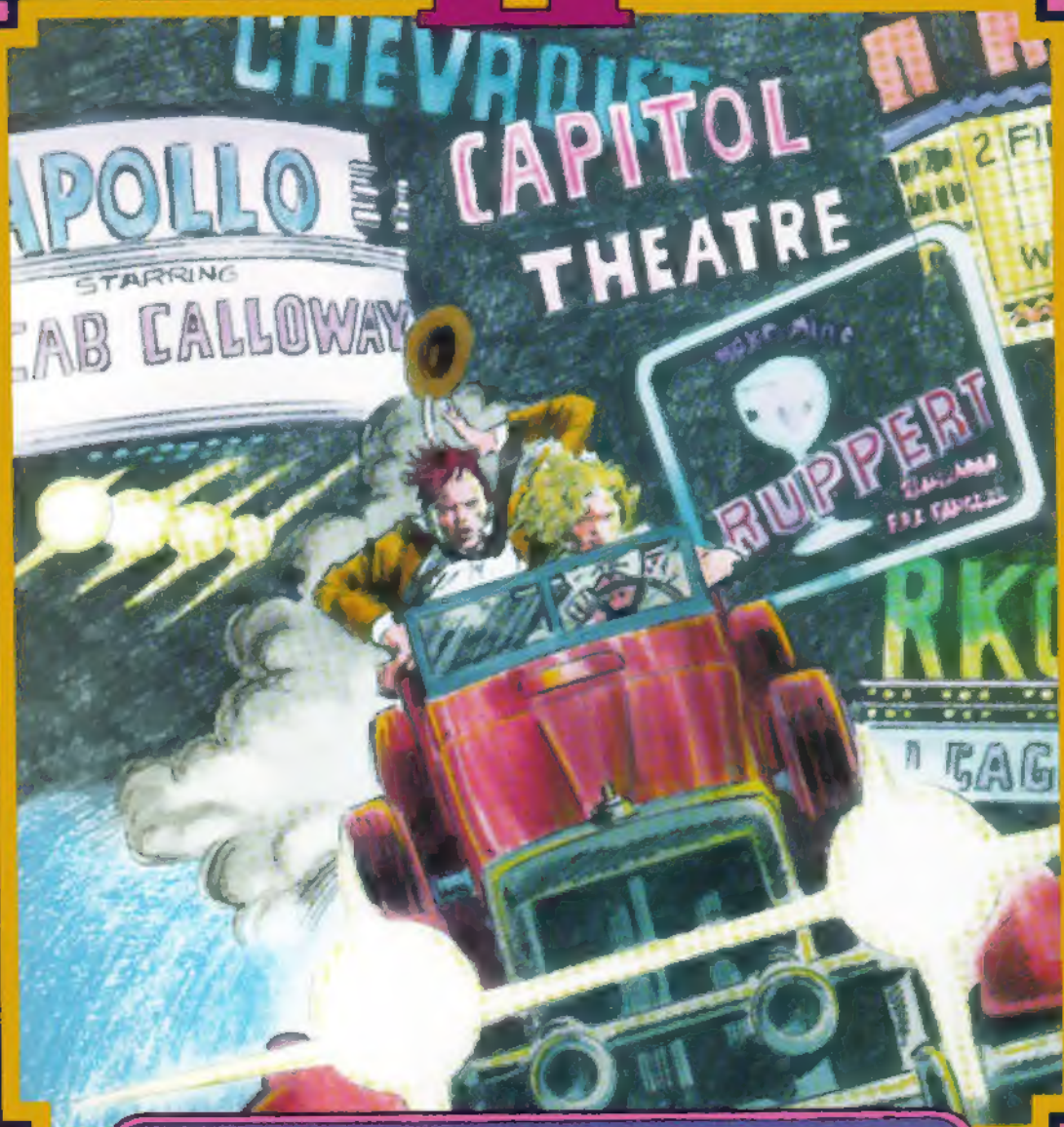
NATHANIEL DUSK

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

II



APPLE PEDDLERS DIE AT NOON—PART 2

NATHANIEL DUSK II

"Apple Peddlers Die at Noon"
Part 2

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DC Comics Inc
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THERE WAS A HURRICANE INSIDE MY HEAD--
--WHUMPHING AND THUMPHING AND FLINGING DEBRIS CRASHING AGAINST THE INSIDE WALLS OF MY SKULL.
I SAW THE UNICORN THROUGH A RAIN-CURTAIN--
--SAW THE MYTHICAL HORN FORGED IN DETROIT PLUNGING TOWARD MY HEART--
--SECONDS AWAY FROM RIPPING THROUGH IT AS IF IT WERE PART OF SOME CANNIBAL'S SHISH KEBAB!

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IT WAS MORE ACCIDENT THAN CALCULATION THAT SAVED ME. I TRIED TO SHRINK AWAY FROM THE ONSLAUGHT, AND MY HAND SLIPPED INTO THE WET GOOSHINESS OF THE GUTTER. MY ARM GAVE WAY AND MY BODY FOLLOWED IT.
THE HURRICANE THAT WAS OUTSIDE MY HEAD SWEPT DIRTY WATER INTO MY MOUTH.
I SWALLOWED SOMETHING MUCOID. I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO CONSIDER WHAT IT MIGHT BE.
MY BRAIN WASN'T WORKING ENOUGH TO TELL ME TO CLOSE MY MOUTH.
THE CAR SHOOK UNDER THE IMPACT!
METAL TORE INWARD--
--WITH A TORTURED SCREECH OF MECHANICAL DEATH!

I HAD EVEN FORGOTTEN THE GUNMAN, WORSE, FORGOTTEN THAT ME HAD A GUN, UNTIL I HEARD CRANSTON'S ENRAGED SHOUTING.
HIS CURSES JOINED THE WHUMPING-AND-THUMPING CHORUS IN MY HEAD. RAIN SLASHED LIKE HISSING CYMBALS.
COME ON, YOU SON OF A BITCH!
YOU WANT TO TANGLE WITH ME, DO IT LIKE A MAN, FACE-TO-FACE!
I'LL MAKE YOU EAT THAT PEASHOOTER!
SHAR-
KAOW!
SHAR-
KA
OW!
YOU BETTER RUN, YOU GODDAMN GRIFTER!
KRIS-
WHINNN

THE CLIENTELE OF THE HUNGRY UNICORN RESTAURANT BRAVED THE SNOW TO SEE THE FANTASTIC SIGHT OF A UNICORN WITH ITS HORN STUCK IN THE BONNET OF A PONTIAC.
YOU SEE THAT UNICORN? DID A BRAINE RIGHT OFF ITS HINGES!
CRANSTON, YOU MIND CURSING THE GUY TO DEATH LATER, AND GIVING ME A HAND?
IF I HAD LUNGS FOR RUNNING, I'D GIVE HIM MORE THAN SOME LIP! THAT JERK DIDN'T HAVE ANY BACKBONE! JUST A GUTLESS, SNEAK. JEEZ, YOU KNOW THAT AXLE IN THIS ROOF COULD HAVE BEEN THROUGH YOU?
WHAT YOU DID, CHARGING ACROSS THE STREET LIKE THAT AT A GUY POINTING A GUN AT YOU, WAS EITHER A GUTSY OR INSANE THING TO DO.
WASN'T GUTS.
IT WAS ANGER! I HATE SPINELESS INCOMPETENTS!
HOW MANY TIMES DID HE WHACK ME IN THE HEAD WITH THAT ARTILLERY?
I WASN'T COUNTING.
MY... MY CAR... LOOK WHAT HAPPENED TO MY...
HOW DO I EXPLAIN A THING LIKE THIS TO MY INSURANCE COMPANY?

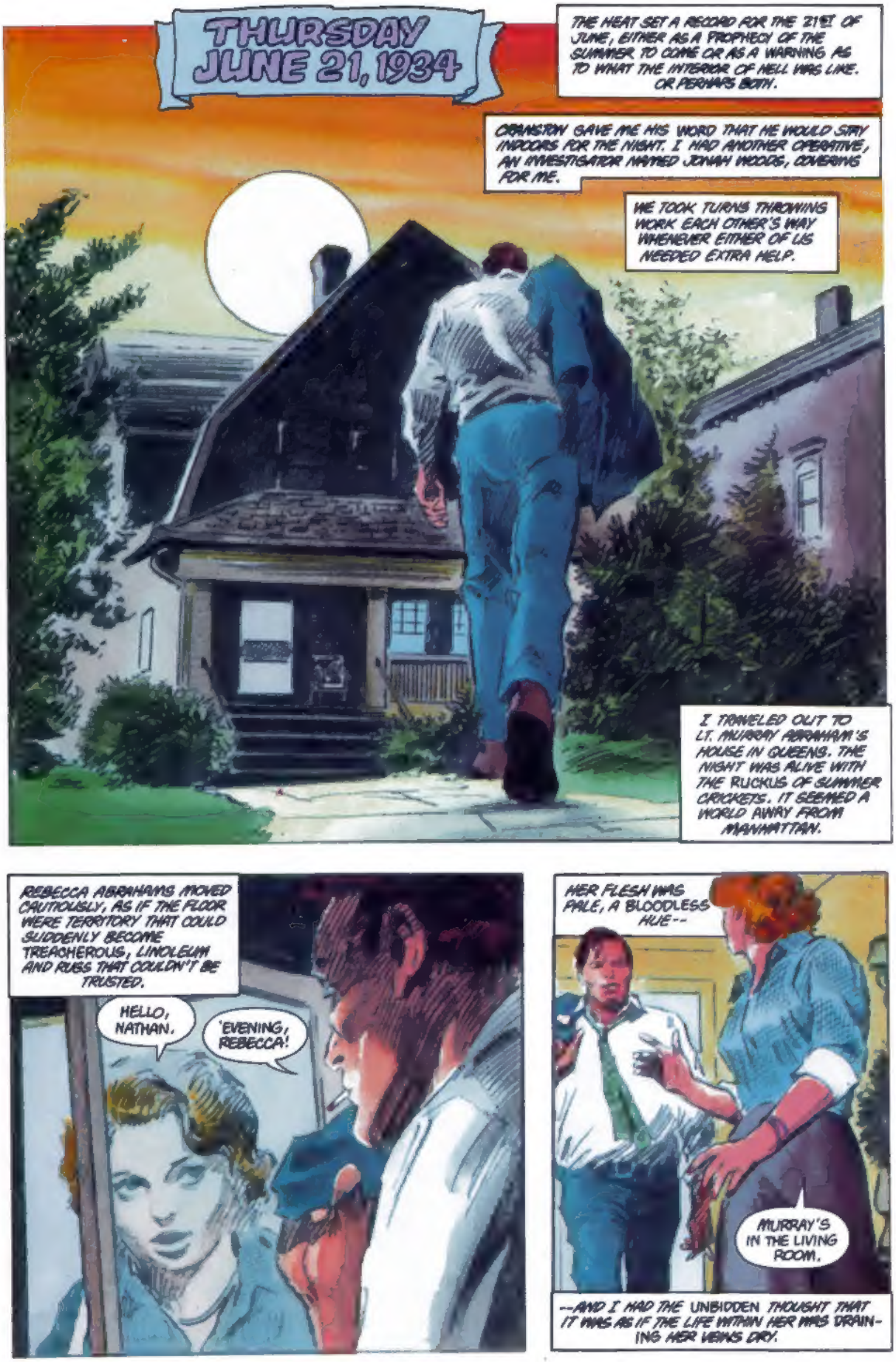
THEY'RE GETTING DESPERATE.
WHO, CRANSTON? WHO'S GETTING DESPERATE?
AND WHY?
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
THE GUY WHO'S TRYING TO GIVE ME A LEASE ON A GRAVESITE.

YOU'RE THE DETECTIVE.
ME?
I'M JUST A JOE PEDDLING APPLES TO GO-GETTERS.

STOP TALKING THROUGH YOUR HAT, CRANSTON.
I WASN'T BORN YESTERDAY.
ME NEITHER, KID. ME NEITHER.

COME ON, BUDDY. YOU NEED A STIFF DRINK. IT WAS BUTCHER UP THINGS LIKE THIS THAT MADE THEM REPEAL PROHIBITION.
MY... BEAUTIFUL... CAR...
YOU THINK EVEN MY OLD LADY WILL BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL HER WHAT HAPPENED?
WHATSA MATTER, SHERLOCK? DON'T YOU KNOW ENOUGH TO COME IN OUT OF THE RAIN?
THAT'S WHAT MY MOTHER USED TO ASK. SHE ALSO WANTED TO KNOW IF I'D EVER HEARD OF UMBRELLAS OR RUBBERS.
I ALWAYS LOST UMBRELLAS.
I ALWAYS HATED RUBBERS.
WHAT ARE YOU SCROUNGING AROUND DOWN THERE FOR?
THIS. ONE OF THE SAINT BULLETS.
WHAT THE HELL WE NEED WITH THAT? LONG AS IT ISN'T IN MY BREADBASKET, WHAT THE HELL DO I CARE WHERE IT IS?
WHO KNOWS... MAYBE WE CAN TRACE THE WEAPON... OR IF ONE EVENTUALLY ENDS UP IN YOUR THICK DOME, WE CAN COMPARE THE BULLET THAT GOT YOU--
--WITH THE ONE THAT DIDN'T.
NOT THAT THAT'LL CONSOLE YOUR DAUGHTER, AMANDA, MUCH, BUT AT LEAST SHE'LL KNOW I WAS TRYING TO EARN MY PAY.
OH, VERY FUNNY.
THAT'S NOT WHAT SHE'S PAYING YOU FOR. SHE'S PAYING YOU TO KEEP ME ALIVE.

YOU'RE NOT DOING MUCH TO HELP ME KEEP THE OLD TICKER GOING, CRANSTON. SOMEHOW YOU DON'T SEEM TO TAKE THIS WHOLE THING SERIOUSLY.
YOU SAW HOW INEPT THIS GUY IS.
EVEN AN INEPT CHUMP CAN PUT A BULLET THROUGH YOU.
DON'T PUSH, KID.
I'M TAKING THIS TO THE POLICE.
NO POLICE!
WHY NOT?
WE STARED AT EACH OTHER. THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT WANTED TO PUNCH HIM RIGHT IN THE MOUTH.
IT'S NOT THE ADVISABLE THING TO DO TO CLIENTS. IT TENDS TO DISCOURAGE A GOOD RECOMMENDATION.
'CAUSE THEY CAN'T FIND THEIR OWN SHADOWS, AND USUALLY END UP THROWING THEIR SHADOWS OVER YOUR OWN.
EVEN IN THE DARK, SLASHING RAIN, I COULD TELL CRANSTON WANTED TO TAKE A POKE AT ME, TOO, BUT HE GOT HIS TEMPER UNDER CONTROL. IT TOOK GREAT EFFORT.
I THINK HE HAD ARGUED HIMSELF OUT OF TAKING THE SWINGS. I WONDERED WHAT HIS ARGUMENT HAD BEEN.
WHATEVER IT WAS, IT HAD BEEN PERSUASIVE. HE FORCED A BUSINESSMAN'S SMILE, AND I SAW HIM AS HE MUST HAVE BEEN FIVE YEARS BACK--
--THE MASTER WHEELER-DEALER, WHO MADE YOU FEEL HE WAS DOING YOU A FAVOR WHILE HE USED YOU LIKE A TEN-DOLLAR HOOKER.
COME ON, KID, THROW THE STUPID BULLET AWAY. WE DON'T NEED IT.
'SIDES, KID, I GOT A FEELING THIS IS GOING TO BLOW OVER REAL SOON. YOU WORRY TOO MUCH.
THAT'S BECAUSE I HAVE TO DO IT FOR THE BOTH OF US.


THURSDAY JUNE 21, 1934
THE HEAT SET A RECORD FOR THE 21ST OF JUNE, EITHER AS A PROPHECY OF THE SUMMER TO COME OR AS A WARNING AS TO WHAT THE INTERIOR OF HELL WAS LIKE. OR PERHAPS BOTH.
OBANSTON GAVE ME HIS WORD THAT HE WOULD STAY INDOORS FOR THE NIGHT. I HAD ANOTHER OPERATIVE, AN INVESTIGATOR NAMED JONAH WOODS, COVERING FOR ME.
WE TOOK TURNS THROWING WORK EACH OTHER'S WAY WHENEVER EITHER OF US NEEDED EXTRA HELP.
I TRAVELED OUT TO LT. MURRAY ABRAHAM'S HOUSE IN QUEENS. THE NIGHT WAS ALIVE WITH THE RUCKUS OF SUMMER CRICKETS. IT SEEMED A WORLD AWAY FROM MANHATTAN.
REBECCA ABRAHAMS MOVED CAUTIOUSLY, AS IF THE FLOOR WERE TERRITORY THAT COULD SUDDENLY BECOME TREACHEROUS, LINOLEUM AND RUGS THAT COULDN'T BE TRUSTED.
HELLO, NATHAN.
'EVENING, REBECCA!
HER FLESH WAS PALE, A BLOODLESS HUE--
MURRAY'S IN THE LIVING ROOM.
--AND I HAD THE UNBIDDEN THOUGHT THAT IT WAS AS IF THE LIFE WITHIN HER WAS DRAINING HER VEINS DRY.

THE THOUGHT DISMAYED ME, AND I FELT GUILTY FOR HAVING IT.
COMPANY, DEAR.
WELL, WELL... LOOK WHAT THE CAT DRUG IN.
THANKS FOR LEADING ME INTO THE DEN OF THE BEAST, BECKY.
TELL ME, WHERE DO YOU KEEP THE WHIP AND THE CHAIR? I MIGHT NEED IT.
IGNORE HIM. HE JUST LIKES TO ACT THE GRUMP.
I THINK THIS IS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE BEEN OUT TO OUR PLACE SINCE YOU QUIT THE FORCE.
YEAH. I... I'VE NO EXCUSE, REALLY... HOW'VE YOU BEEN DOING?
OH, ME? I'M ALWAYS THE SAME.
I'M TAKING IT SLOW AND EASY.
SHE FIDDLED WITH THE KNICKKNACKS ON THE RADIO, A HOUSEKEEPER'S UNCONSCIOUS ACT. SHE GAVE ME A SOCIALLY PLEASANT SMILE THAT HAD NO MEANING.
I DON'T KNOW IF MURRAY TOLD YOU, BUT I HAVE TO WALK FOR TWO NOW.
I'M 38. THAT'S OLD, YOU KNOW, TO BE TRYING TO HAVE A BABY AGAIN.

SHE THINKS 38 IS OLD. TRY 50, REBECCA.
SHE WAS JUST A KID WHEN I MARRIED HER. I ROBBED THE CRADLE.
I'LL GET YOU BOTH SOME CAKE YOU LIKE CHOCOLATE CAKE, NATHAN?
I'VE GOT THE CAVITIES AND FILLINGS FROM MY CHILDHOOD TO PROVE MY YEN FOR CHOCOLATE CAKE, BECKY.
SO...
TO WHAT DO WE OWE THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY IN THIS NECK OF THE WOODS?
WHAT'S THIS?
I WON'T TELL ANYBODY THAT A CRACKERJACK POLICE LIEUTENANT LIKE YOURSELF CAN'T TELL A BULLET WHEN IT'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIS NOSE.
WELL, I KNOW IT'S A BULLET FROM A SMALL CALIBER GUN, BUT WHY THE HELL DID YOU TRAIPSE OUT HERE TO QUEENS TO SHOW ME THIS?
THIS IS A SLUG THAT MISSED YOUR DOME?
YES AND NO.
THE BULLET WASN'T MEANT FOR ME, BUT A CLIENT I'VE BEEN HIRED TO BODYGUARD.
I'D LIKE YOU TO RUN A BALLISTICS TEST ON IT, SEE IF YOU CAN LINK IT TO A GUN.
ANY IDEA WHO WANTS TO RUB HIM OUT?
HE'S PLAYING IT CLOSE TO THE VEST, MURRAY. I DON'T KNOW IF HE KNOWS WHO'S PULLING THE TRIGGER OR NOT
MY GUESS IS HE'S GOT SOME IDEAS WHO IT MIGHT BE, BUT HE'S NOT SPEAKING THEM ALOUD.

HE'S PLAYING A *DANGEROUS* KIND OF *SHELL* GAME, MURRAY. I CAN SMELL IT. AND HE THINKS HE'S GOT ALL THE *PEAS* STASHED IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND.

AND THAT'S THE PROBLEM. THE SON OF A B*TCH *THINKS* HE'S PLAYING WITH PEAS.

AND HE ISN'T?

NO. HE'S PLAYING WITH *DYNAMITE*. AND THE FUSE HAS BEEN LIT FOR GOD KNOWS HOW LONG.

FRIDAY JUNE 22, 1934

FRIDAY MORNING WAS AS GRAY AS A LOST DREAM.

IT WAS 80° BY EIGHT O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

I SAT IN FREDDIE BICKENHACKER'S CHAIR AND LISTENED TO THE RHYTHMIC SNAP *OF HIS BRUSH ON LEATHER AND WATCHED OSCAR FLAM ACROSS THE WAY MANGLE A MORNING PAPER, AND FIGURED SINCE I WAS HAVING MY SHOES POLISHED IT WOULD SURE AS HELL RAIN.*

TOO BAD YOU GUYS CAN'T *SQUARE AWAY* YOUR DIFFERENCES, YOU KNOW?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

YOU AND OSCAR. DON'T PLAY *DUMB* WITH ME, NATE.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, FREDDIE.

HEY! I DON'T *PRY!* I NEVER ASKED YOU OR HIM WHAT IT IS MAKES YOU SO *EDGY* WHEN YOU'RE AROUND EACH OTHER THESE DAYS.

BUT YOU CAN'T HELP BUT *NOTICE* IT.

HOW'S OSCAR'S KID DOING?

YOU SEE?

YOU DON'T ASK HIM NO MORE.

FWIP-A-ZIP

BUT YOU'RE STILL CONCERNED. HIS KID'S THE SAME, I GUESS. HE DON'T GET BETTER. HE DON'T GET WORSE.

YOU READ IN THE PAPER HERE, THERE'S A REAL EPIDEMIC OF THIS INFANTILE PARALYSIS GOING AROUND.

WIP-A-WIP

ALL THE GLAMOUR PUSSES, THEY'RE AFRAID TO USE THOSE BIG SWIMMING POOLS THEY GOT.

SOME DOCTORS THINK YOU CAN GET IT FROM TAKING A DIP IN A POOL, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD.

SHE'D BEEN IN A POOL...SO THEY'RE ALL STAYING HOT AND DRY OUT THERE.

'COURSE, HERE IN NEW YORK, MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW FROM POOLS. THEY'LL ALL BE OUT AT CONEY ISLAND.

AND THAT STARLET. WHAT'S HER NAME?

IDA SOME-THING?

IDA ROMINA?

WHICH REMINDS ME, I'LL BETCHA THEY'LL HAVE HUNDREDS OF GUYS WEARING THEM NEW-FANGLED TOPLESS SWIM SUITS--

--IF THE 4TH'S A SCORCHER.

REMEMBER I TOLD YOU I'M TAKING BETS ON THIS. YOU WANT TO TAKE SOME ODDS ON WHETHER JUDGE O'DYER IS GONNA THROW GUYS IN THE CLINK FOR SHOWING THEIR HAIRY NAVELS?

FREDDIE...

YOU'D TAKE A BET ON ANYTHING...INCLUDING WHETHER IT'LL RAIN OR SHINE ON THE DAY OF YOUR FUNERAL.

NAH! THAT'S NOT IT! LUPINO! YEAH, HER.

SHE COME DOWN WITH POLIO...A MILD CASE, I GUESS, BUT STILL...

JONAH WOODS WAS GLAD TO BE RELIEVED.

SHE WAS A FLAPPER A FEW YEARS BACK, AND SHE SHARED A LOVE NEST WITH MY CLIENT, THE GUY I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE OTHER DAY.
YOU GOT IT?
I'M ON MY WAY TO MEET CRANSTON NOW. SEE YOU LATER.

THE LOBBY TO CRANSTON'S SKID-ROW FLOPHOUSE WASN'T THE PLEASANTEST PLACE TO SPEND THE NIGHT.

IT SMELLED OF BOOZE AND URINE, [illegible] AND YESTERDAY'S SWEAT. IT WAS A SHADDNY PLACE THAT HELD HEAT THE SAME WAY IT HELD SMELLS.

THE FIFTH KEY ON MY RING OF SKELETON KEYS TURNED THE LOCK
I WENT IN FAST.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D EXPECTED TO SEE. BLOOD, I SUPPOSE. DEATH
JOYCE AND LITTLE LIZZIE WENT IN WITH ME
EMPTY.
NO BODY.
NO BLOOD STAINS.
NOTHING OUT OF PLACE.
BE ST... JOYCE
GO AWAY LIZZIE.
I WASN'T SURE WHERE TO LOOK FOR HIM FIRST--
--THE SPOT WHERE HE SOLD HIS APPLES--
--OR THE MORGUE.
...WHERE THEY TOOK THE VICTIMS OF THE NIGHT.

I TELL YA, CHARLIE, MY GOOD LUCK UNICORN AIN'T NEVER GONNA BE THE SAME IT'S LOST ITS PIZZAZZ!
I RAN DOWN THE ROWS OF RAIN-WASHED APPLES, LOOKING FOR ONE THAT WAS SPIKED, HOPING TO SPOT ITS SYMBOL OF IMPALEMENT.
IT WOULD MEAN CRANSTON WAS AT THE OLD STAND.
BUT HIS SPACE WAS VACANT.
I SWORE. I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO CALL AMANDA, TELL HER I HAD LOST HER FATHER.
A HAND CLUTCHED MY SHOULDER--
--AND I FELT THE ADRENALINE FLOOD THROUGH MY BODY LIKE WATER SURGING THROUGH A HOLE IN A DIKE.
HEY, KID
I SEE YOU STILL DON'T HAVE ENOUGH SENSE TO COME IN OUT OF THE RAIN.
WHERE
THE HELL
HAVE YOU BEEN?

DON'T FORGET YOURSELF, KID! YOU'RE HIRED HELP, NOTHING MORE!

YOU DUCKED OUT ON THE OPERATIVE I HAD WATCHING YOU!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TRYING TO DO, MAKE IT EASY FOR WHOEVER'S TRYING TO PUT SOME LEAD INTO YOUR STOMACH?

I'M NOT A PRISONER, MR. PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR.

I GO MY OWN WAY!

I TOLD YOU THAT FROM THE BEGIN-NING.

ALL RIGHT!

HAVE IT YOUR WAY!

WHUK!

YOU CAN SEE THIS THING THROUGH ALONE!

HEY!

HEY, NOW!

LET'S SETTLE DOWN, KID!

NO SENSE US RUBBING EACH OTHER THE WRONG WAY.

I THINK ALL OF THIS NONSENSE IS ALMOST OVER.

SOMEONE TRYING TO PUMP YOU FULL OF BULLETS IS NONSENSE?

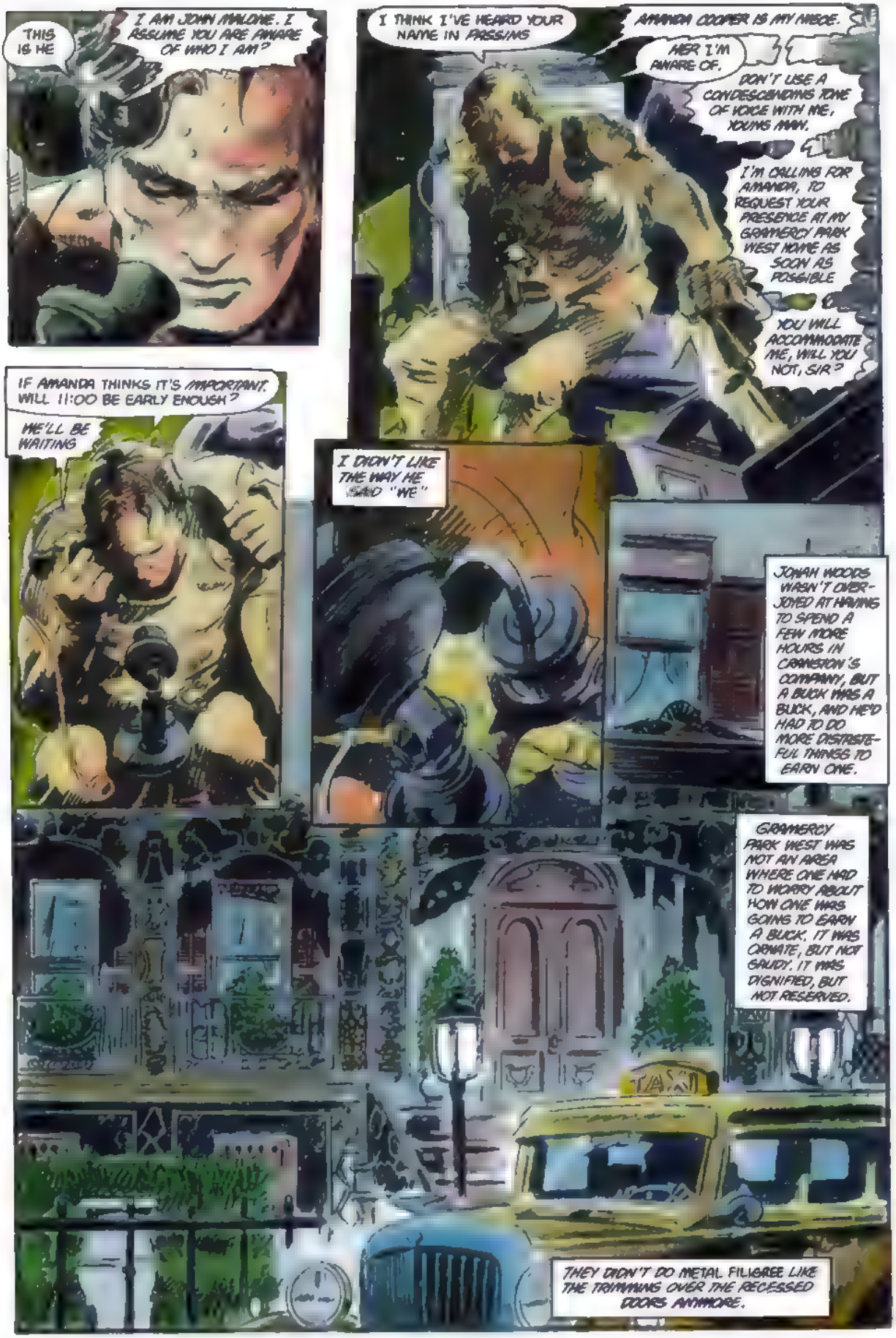
I'M TELLING YOU NOT TO WORRY, KID
YOU STAY WITH ME ANOTHER WEEK, TWO AT THE MOST, I THINK WE'LL HAVE THIS THING SQUARED AWAY.
AND I'LL PERSONALLY PAY YOU A BONUS ON TOP OF WHAT MY DAUGHTER IS PAYING YOU. GUARANTEED, KID!
YEAH. YOU'LL PAY ME WITH WHAT? THE SPARE CHANGE YOU GET FROM BUSINESSMEN WHO FEEL GUILTY THAT THEY AREN'T ON THE DOLE?
OR MAYBE YOU'LL GIVE ME A BITE OF YOUR LUCKY APPLE ON THE SPIKE!
THE ONES IN THE CART ARE BETTER
KID, I JUST NEED YOU AROUND TILL EVERYONE GETS THEIR MINDS SET RIGHT.
WHO, CRANSTON? WHO GETS THEIR MINDS SET RIGHT?
WHY, THE WORLD, KID. THE WORLD, OF COURSE.
WEDNESDAY JUNE 27, 1934
IT BECAME WETTER WHEN THE RAIN WENT AWAY TO THAT PLACE OF LIGHTNING AND THUNDER.
THE TEMPERATURE ROSE, AND WITH IT THE HUMIDITY, WHICH WAS 90% BY NINE O'CLOCK.
PRIVATE INVES
MY OFFICE WINDOWS LET IN GAS FUMES WITH THE WET AIR.

IT WAS A COMBINATION CERTAIN TO KILL EVERYTHING BUT THE COCKROACHES.
I WONDER IF YOU COULD DROWN SLEEPING AT YOUR DESK.
RING
IT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE TOO MUCH OF AN IMPOSSIBILITY.

TIME TO GET UP, TIME TO GO BABY-SIT CRANSTON THROUGH ANOTHER UNIT OF APPLES, CEMENT, AND HEAT.
RING

TIME TO RELIEVE JONAH WOODS
MY FEET ARGUED AGAINST REPEATING THIS ROUTINE--
RING

MR NATHANIEL DUSK, PLEASE?
THE SWEAT IN MY EYEBROWS DRIPPED DOWN INTO MY EYES LIKE TINY DROPS OF ACID, STINGING.
THE VOICE WAS CLIPPED, SHARP LIKE A REVIVALIST PREACHER ORATING THE PROMISES OF SIN AND DAMNATION TO THE BACK OF A TENT. IT WAS A VOICE FULL OF HORATIO ALGER CONFIDENCE. FOOLISHLY, I WISHED I WAS DRESSED IN MORE THAN AN UNDERSHIRT.


THIS IS HE
I AM JOHN MALONE. I ASSUME YOU ARE AWARE OF WHO I AM?
I THINK I'VE HEARD YOUR NAME IN PASSING
AMANDA COOPER IS MY NIECE.
NEITHER I'M AWARE OF.
DON'T USE A CONDESCENDING TONE OF VOICE WITH ME, YOUNG MAN.
I'M CALLING FOR AMANDA, TO REQUEST YOUR PRESENCE AT MY GRAMERCY PARK WEST HOME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE
YOU WILL ACCOMMODATE ME, WILL YOU NOT, SIR?
IF AMANDA THINKS IT'S IMPORTANT, WILL 11:00 BE EARLY ENOUGH?
HE'LL BE WAITING
I DIDN'T LIKE THE WAY HE SAID "WE"
JONAH WOODS WASN'T OVERJOYED AT HAVING TO SPEND A FEW MORE HOURS IN CRANSTON'S COMPANY, BUT A BUCK WAS A BUCK, AND HE'D HAD TO DO MORE DISTASTEFUL THINGS TO EARN ONE.
GRAMERCY PARK WEST WAS NOT AN AREA WHERE ONE HAD TO WORRY ABOUT HOW ONE WAS GOING TO EARN A BUCK. IT WAS ORNATE, BUT NOT GAUDY. IT WAS DIGNIFIED, BUT NOT RESERVED.
THEY DIDN'T DO METAL FILIGREE LIKE THE TRIMMINGS OVER THE RECESSED DOORS ANYMORE.

MR. MALONE ASKED TO SEE ME. I'M NATHANIEL DUSK.

RIGHT THIS WAY, SIR. HE'S EXPECTING YOU.

JOHN MALONE SHOWED HIS PURITANICAL HERITAGE AND WORK-ETHIC PHILOSOPHY IN HIS VERY BEARING. HE WAS RAMROD STIFF, AS IF HIS SPINE WERE MADE OF METAL PIPING.

HIS HAIR WAS THE COLOR OF FLINT AND LOOKED LIKE IT WAS TRIMMED THREE TIMES A WEEK.

HE SMELLED OF TALCUM POWDER AND DID NOT SEEM TO FEEL THE 90% HUMIDITY.

HE DID NOT MAKE CONCESSION TO HUMAN INFIRMITIES, HIS OWN OR OTHERS.

JOHN MALONE DIDN'T SHAKE HANDS IN WELCOME OR FRIENDSHIP, HE SHOOK HANDS LIKE HE WAS TRYING TO CRUSH AN OPPONENT.

SIT DOWN, MR. DUSK!

I WAS STILL FEELING SWEATY AND DIRTY. I HAD AN ITCH IN MY CROTCH, BUT I KNEW IT WASN'T POLITE TO SCRATCH.

I'LL STAND, THANKS.

I DON'T THINK YOU'LL NEED THAT STEAM ROOM TODAY.

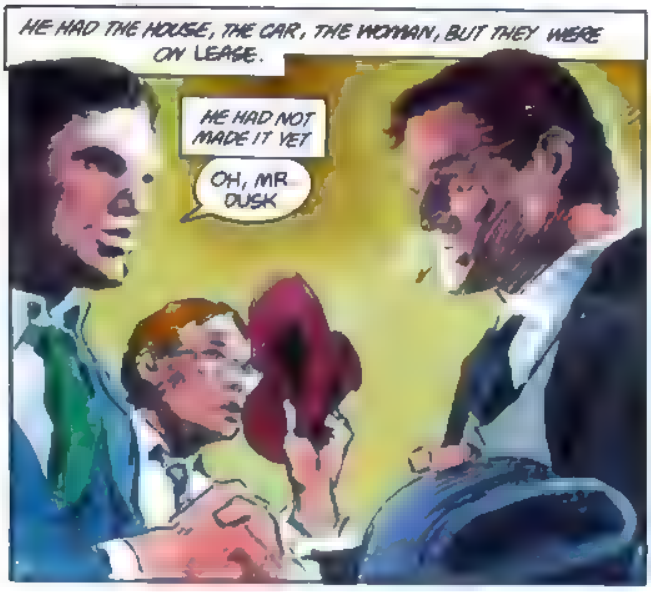
IT'S QUITE INVIGORATING.

I HAD IT CUSTOM BUILT.

YOU MUST BE AMANDA'S MOTHER.
HOW DID YOU KNOW?
FAMILY RESEMBLANCE
AUGUSTA MALONE HAD HARD BLUE EYES THAT HELD THE FROSTINESS OF DISDAIN BETTER THAN ANY OTHER EMOTION.
THE HARDNESS SEEMED AN ACQUIRED LOOK, ONE SHE HAD LEARNED DISCOURAGED OTHERS WHO MIGHT TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HER.
I HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE FROSTINESS WOULD NOT BE IN HER EYES DURING THE LONG HOURS OF THE NIGHT, WHEN EVERYONE ELSE WAS ASLEEP, AND SHE WAS STILL AWAKE--
--HER EYES WIDE IN THE DARK.
AT THOSE LONELY HOURS SHE WOULD BE HOSTAGE TO ALL THE HUMAN FEARS SHE FOUGHT SO DILIGENTLY AGAINST DURING THE DAY.
I DO NOT LIKE WHAT YOU ARE DOING, MR. DUSK.
AND WHAT WOULD THAT BE YOU DON'T LIKE?
TAKING MY MONEY TO NURSEMAID HER FATHER.
YOUR DAUGHTER'S AFRAID SOMEONE WILL KILL HIM.
DELUSIONS! TOO MUCH DRINK! THAT'S ALL IT IS.
NOT QUITE. ONE ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE ALMOST TOOK ME WITH HIM.
I'M NOT PRONE TO DELUSIONS.
I'M SORRY FOR YOUR INCONVENIENCE, BUT IT'S TOO BAD WHOEVER IT WAS MISSED THAT MISERABLE EXCUSE FOR A MAN.
YES.
I UNDERSTAND.
YOU DON'T LOVE HIM ANYMORE.
THE FIRST TIME I MARRIED FOR LOVE, MR. DUSK...THE SECOND TIME I WAS WISER. I DID NOT IGNORE THE REALITIES OF SOCIAL STATION AND BREEDING.
IT'S TOO BAD AMANDA DIDN'T LEARN FROM MY MISTAKES!

ONE WAY OR THE OTHER WE ALL MAKE OUR OWN MISTAKES. IT MIGHT BE NICE IF OTHERS COULD MAKE ALL THE MISTAKES FOR US, BUT THAT ISN'T THE WAY LIFE IS, MRS...
WHAT IS YOUR NEW MARRIED NAME?
SHUT THAT DOOR!
SLAM
YOU'RE NOT HERE TO INDULGE YOUR CURIOSITY, OR ASK MY SISTER IMPERTINENT QUESTIONS.
LET'S NOT BEAT AROUND THE BUSH, YOUNG MAN! LET'S GET STRAIGHT TO THE THICK OF THE MATTER!
YOU HAVE BEEN SPONGING OFF MY NIECE, TAKING HER MONEY. YOU ARE AN OPPORTUNIST, YOUNG MAN, AND I WILL NOT STAND FOR IT.
THEN, YOU'D BETTER SIT DOWN
WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO DO IS FIRE ME, I TAKE IT. WELL, MR. MALONE, MY APOLOGIES, BUT YOU CAN'T FIRE ME.
WHY THE HELL NOT?
BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T HIRE ME!
YOUR NIECE DID! AND NOBODY... BUT NOBODY... TAKES ME OFF BUT HER!
AS LONG AS SHE WANTS ME ON THE CASE, I'M ON IT!
I'M AN INFLUENTIAL MAN IN THIS TOWN, YOUNG MAN. I CAN MAKE IT VERY HOT FOR YOU
MUCH HOTTER THAN THE HEAT. I TRUST YOU CATCH MY DRIFT?
SURE, BUT YOU DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ME. NEXT TIME, READ MY LIPS. I'LL TRY NOT TO STUTTER
NOBODY TALKS TO ME THAT WAY!
THAT'S STRANGE.
I COULD HAVE SWORN I JUST DID.

WHAT'S THE MATTER, UNCLE? A SPOT OF TROUBLE?
DON'T CALL ME "UNCLE"! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO REMIND YOU OF THAT, VALENTINE?
THIS...MAN... IS THE DETECTIVE YOUR WIFE HIRED!
THERE WAS THE COLD, HARD LIGHT OF AMBITION IN VALENTINE COOPER'S EYES. HE WAS A MAN WHO COULD NOT REST ON HIS LAURELS.


HE HAD THE HOUSE, THE CAR, THE WOMAN, BUT THEY WERE ON LEASE.
HE HAD NOT MADE IT YET
OH, MR DUSK

YOU'VE BEEN QUITE A TOPIC OF CONSTERNATION AROUND THE MALONE MANOR THE PAST DAY OR SO
WE DISCUSS NOTHING IN FRONT OF THIS.
THIS...

YOU'LL THINK OF A WORD. GIVE IT A MINUTE.

YOU'RE QUITE A CHARACTER I'M ACTUALLY DISPLEASED WITH AMANDA FOR GOING BEHIND MY BACK AND NOT TELLING ME ABOUT YOU

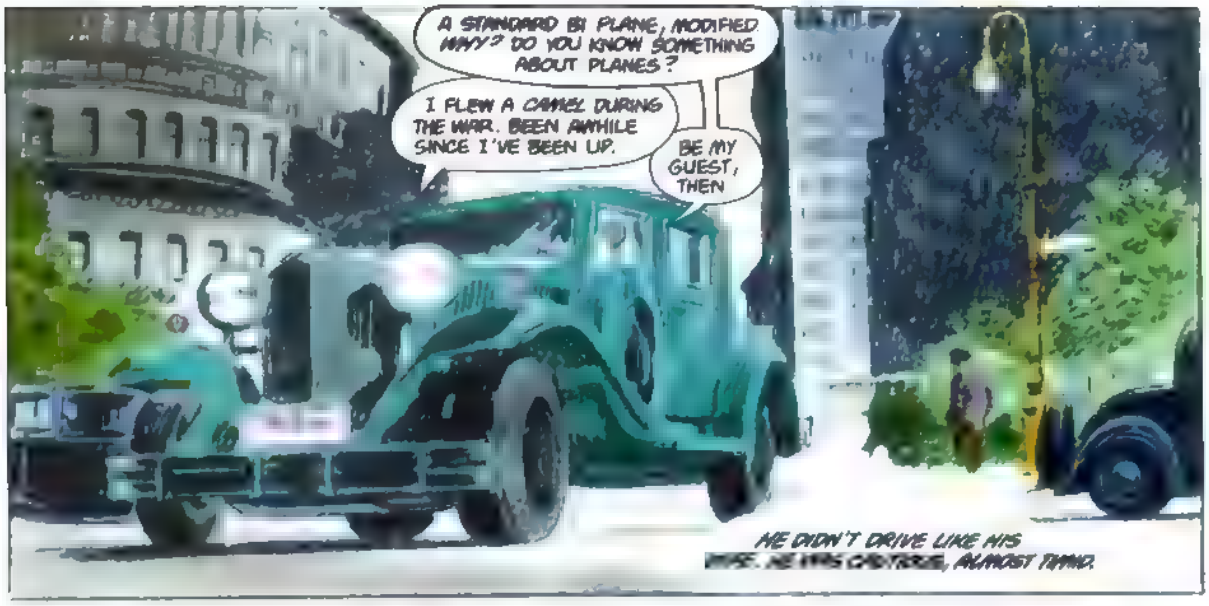
AND WHO'S THIS? LITTLE BO PEEP?
HA HA HA HA HA

THIS IS GANNON MCALLISTER, FIRST AND FOREMOST FOREMAN OF THE MALONE RIBBON COMPANY, INC.
SAY HELLO, GANNON. SPEAK ABOVE A WHISPER SO THE MAN CAN HEAR YOU.
PLEASED TO MEET YOU, SIR.
SAME HERE, GANNON.

GANNON MCALLISTER WAS A MAN WHO KNEW HIS PLACE, AND IT WAS A QUIET PLACE. WORDS GOT PEOPLE INTO TROUBLE.
HE WAS AFRAID TO SPEAK WORDS LEST THEY BE MISUNDERSTOOD, OR WORSE, DISAGREED WITH, OR EVEN WORSE, HELD AGAINST HIM
I CAME OVER WITH VALENTINE FROM THE PLANT IT'S TIME I SHOULD TAKE THE PAYROLL TO THE BANK.
YES, YES. WAIT JUST A MINUTE WHILE I DISMISS THIS...
THIS

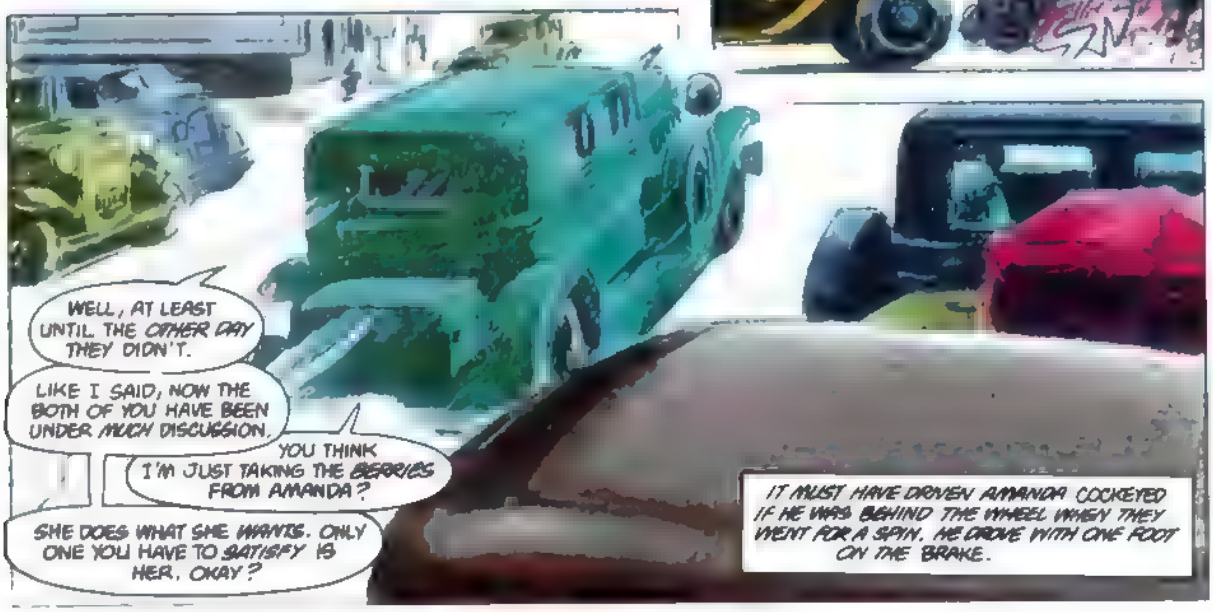
STILL CAN'T FIND THE RIGHT WORD, HEY?
NEVER MIND
I'LL DISMISS MYSELF, LET YOU GET BACK TO YOUR THRONE

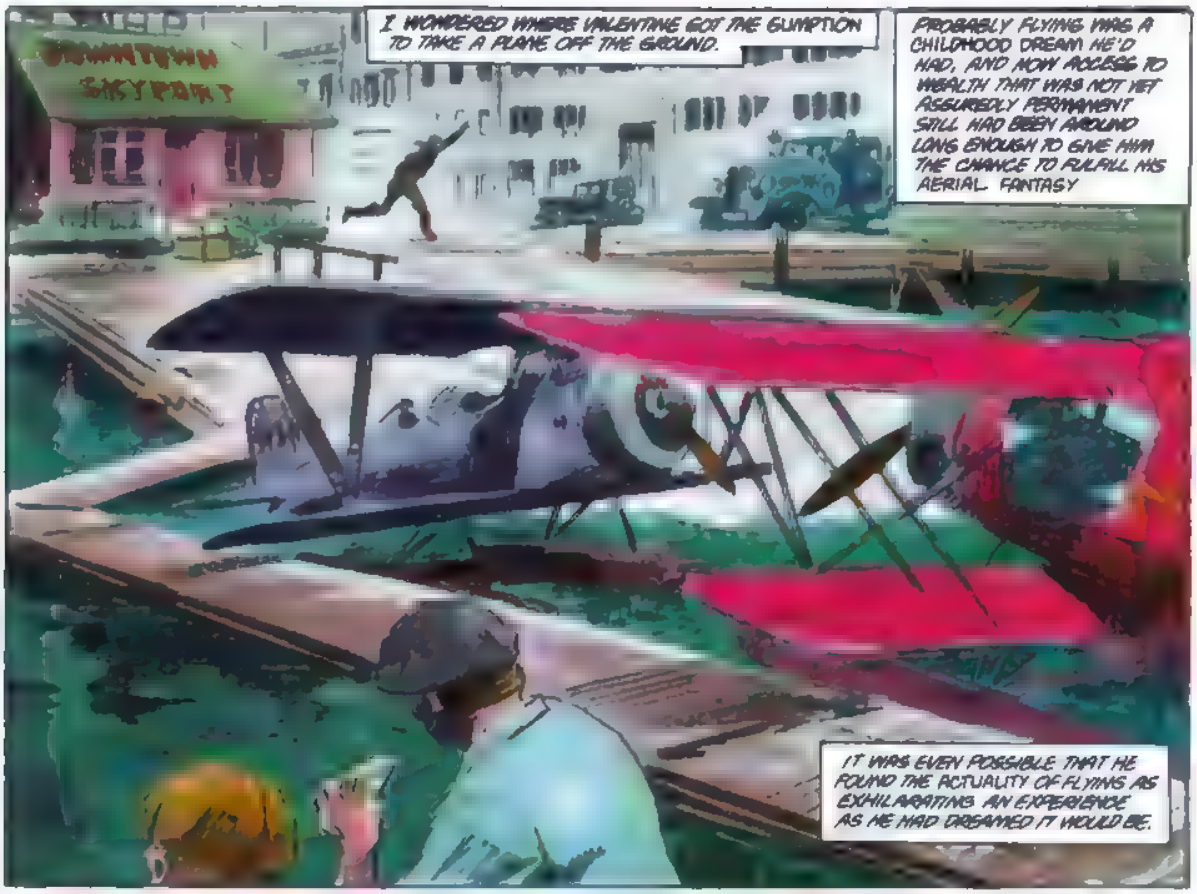
HOLD ON, OLD CHAP!
MY PRESENCE ISN'T REQUIRED HERE FOR THE MOMENT THERE'S A FEW QUESTIONS I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU.
IF YOU'RE GOING TO TRY TO FIRE ME THE WAY HE DID, I MIGHT AS WELL TELL YOU, YOU'LL BE WASTING YOUR BREATH
SIR...
SIR...
FIRE YOU?
I WOULDN'T THINK OF IT.
IF ONLY BECAUSE OF THE ATTACK OF APOPLEXY YOU NEARLY GAVE DEAR UNCLE JOHN
ALLOW ME, SIR
GOOD DAY, SIR
WHY DO I GET THE FEELING YOU AND UNCLE JOHN DON'T LOVE EACH OTHER?
LET'S SAY WE HAVE RECIPROCAL HATE FOR EACH OTHER.
HE'D LIKE TO SPANK AMANDA FOR MARRYING A POOR BUT HONEST COLLEGE BOY.
LISTEN, I'VE AN IDEA!
I HAVE MY PLANE LESSON IN HALF AN HOUR DOWN AT THE SKYPORT ON THE EAST RIVER.
AMANDA IS SUPPOSED TO MEET ME THERE FOR LUNCH.
WHY DON'T YOU COME ALONG WITH ME? I'LL SHOW YOU THE JOYS OF PLANE FLYING, WE'LL GET A CHANCE TO CHAT--
--AND THEN YOU CAN MEET AMANDA AND TELL HER HOW RUTHLESS UNCLE JOHN AND HER MOTHER HAVE BEEN.
WHAT KIND OF PLANE DO YOU FLY?


A STANDARD BI PLANE, MODIFIED WAVY? DO YOU KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT PLANES?
I FLEW A CAMEL DURING THE WAR. BEEN AWHILE SINCE I'VE BEEN UP.
BE MY GUEST, THEN
HE DIDN'T DRIVE LIKE HIS

DO YOU KNOW AMANDA'S FATHER?
NEVER MET THE MAN. DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HE'S DOING THESE DAYS.

IT TOOK HIM A FULL FIVE MINUTES TO PULL OUT INTO THE TRAFFIC. I THINK HE WAS AFRAID OF GETTING A DENT IN HIS EXPENSIVE CAR. HIS EYES GAVE CONTRADICTORY MESSAGES. HE TRIED TO CONVEY CHARM, EASY WARMTH, AND HUMOR, BUT UNDERNEATH ONE COULD SEE HE ANTICIPATED DISASTER.
NO ONE AT THE MALONE MANOR TALKS ABOUT HIM.


WELL, AT LEAST UNTIL THE OTHER DAY THEY DIDN'T.
LIKE I SAID, NOW THE BOTH OF YOU HAVE BEEN UNDER MUCH DISCUSSION.
YOU THINK I'M JUST TAKING THE BERRIES FROM AMANDA?
SHE DOES WHAT SHE WANTS. ONLY ONE YOU HAVE TO SATISFY IS HER, OKAY?
IT MUST HAVE DRIVEN AMANDA COCKEYED IF HE WAS BEHIND THE WHEEL WHEN THEY WENT FOR A SPIN. HE DROVE WITH ONE FOOT ON THE BRAKE.


I WONDERED WHERE VALENTINE GOT THE GUMPTION TO TAKE A PLANE OFF THE GROUND.
PROBABLY FLYING WAS A CHILDHOOD DREAM HE'D HAD, AND NOW ACCESS TO WEALTH THAT WAS NOT YET ASSUREDLY PERMANENT STILL HAD BEEN AROUND LONG ENOUGH TO GIVE HIM THE CHANCE TO FULFILL HIS AERIAL FANTASY
IT WAS EVEN POSSIBLE THAT HE FOUND THE ACTUALITY OF FLYING AS EXHILARATING AN EXPERIENCE AS HE HAD DREAMED IT WOULD BE.

GOOD LORD ALMIGHTY! NATHAN! IT IS YOU! I SAW YOU FROM THE OFFICE, THEN, I SAID TO MYSELF, "AWW, IT CAN'T BE!" BUT IT IS!
BRAD?
BRAD HOLBECK?

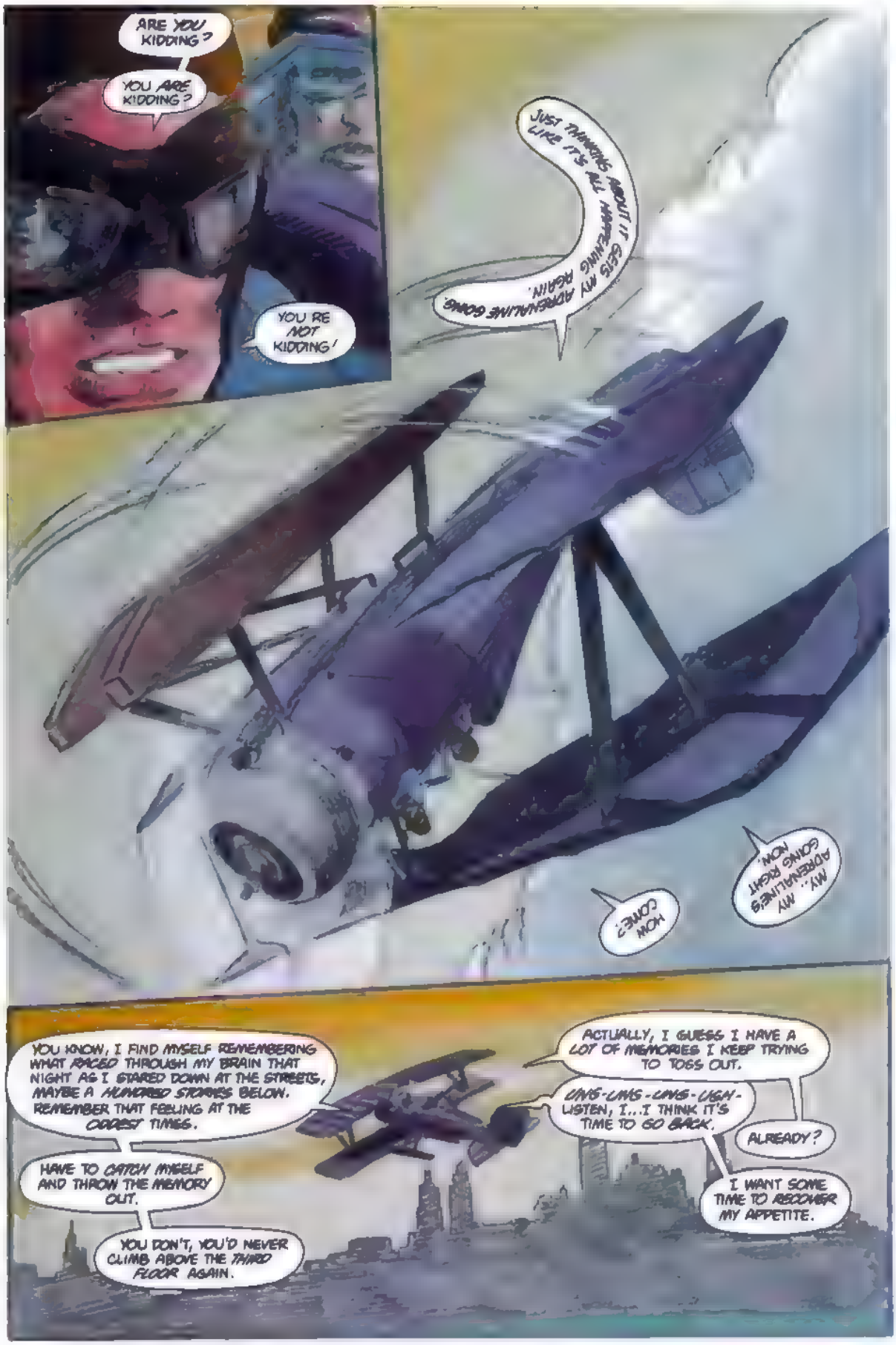
GOD, IT'S BEEN A LONG DAMN TIME SINCE I'VE SEEN YOUR UGLY MUG!
YOU TWO KNOW EACH OTHER?
KNOW HIM? ME AND HIM FLEW TOGETHER SAME SQUADRON.
FLYING WAS DIFFERENT IN THOSE DAYS WENT BY THE SEAT OF YOUR PANTS NO PARACHUTES! JUST MARBLES IN YOUR HEAD

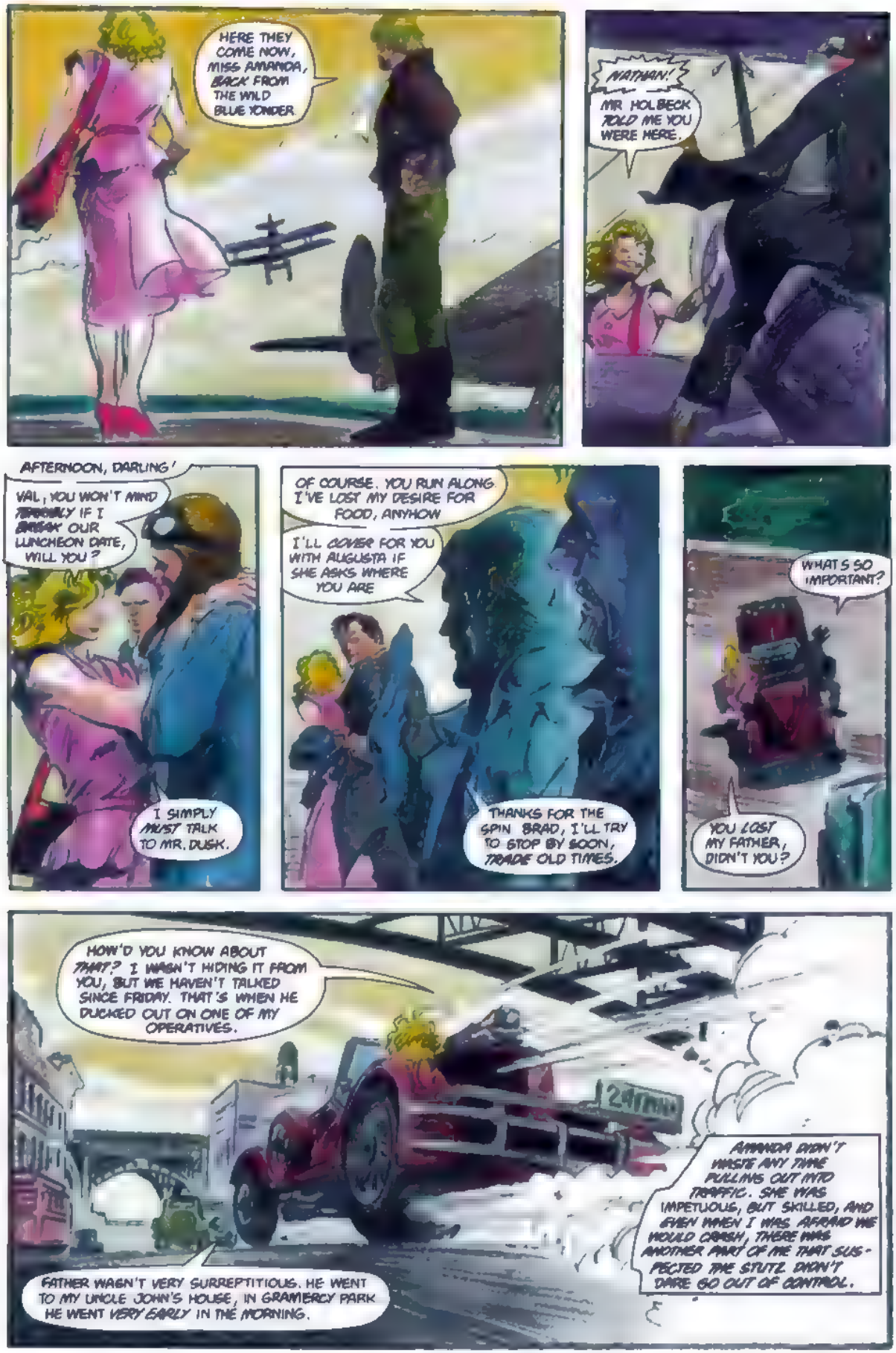
WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO, BRAD?
AH, SOME BARNSTORMING DURING THE 20's. BUT THAT'S ALL DIED OUT.
FUNNY HOW PEOPLE GET USED TO THINGS. TEN YEARS AGO, YOU DROPPED A PLANE IN A FIELD OUTSIDE THEIR FARMS, THEY'D COME UP TO THE THING WITH AWE IN THEIR EYES
BRAD STILL HAD THE OLD ENTHUSIASM IN HIS EYES, AND THE ENERGETIC MANNER--
THEY COULDN'T GODDAMN BELIEVE IT.
NOW YOU'VE GOT TO BE LINDY TO CAUSE A STIR.
--BUT THE DREAM HAD TARNISHED, AND HE WAS FIGHTING HARD NOT TO ADMIT IT.
FLYING HAD MADE HIM SPECIAL, AND NOW HE WAS TEACHING OTHERS HOW TO DO THIS MAGICAL THING--
--OTHER FOLKS WHO DID NOT HAVE THAT LOVE FOR THE AIR AND FOR WINGS AND FOR FLIGHT
HE WAS AN ANGEL WATCHING THE HEAVENS LOSE THEIR DISTANT LURE. HE WAS SEEING NEW ANGELS WITH NO SENSE OF HONOR OR GRACE.
WE'RE GOING TO TAKE HER UP, OKAY, BRAD?
SURE. MAYBE YOU CAN CAJOLE NATE INTO SHOWING YOU HOW IT WAS DONE IN THE OLD DAYS
HOW LONG YOU BEEN TEACHING HIM?
AWHILE.
HE'S OKAY AS A FLIER. HE CAN GET IT UP IN THE AIR AND BACK DOWN. MAKES HIM THINK HE'S A HOTSHOT ACE.
YEH. WELL, WE THOUGHT THAT ONCE, TOO.

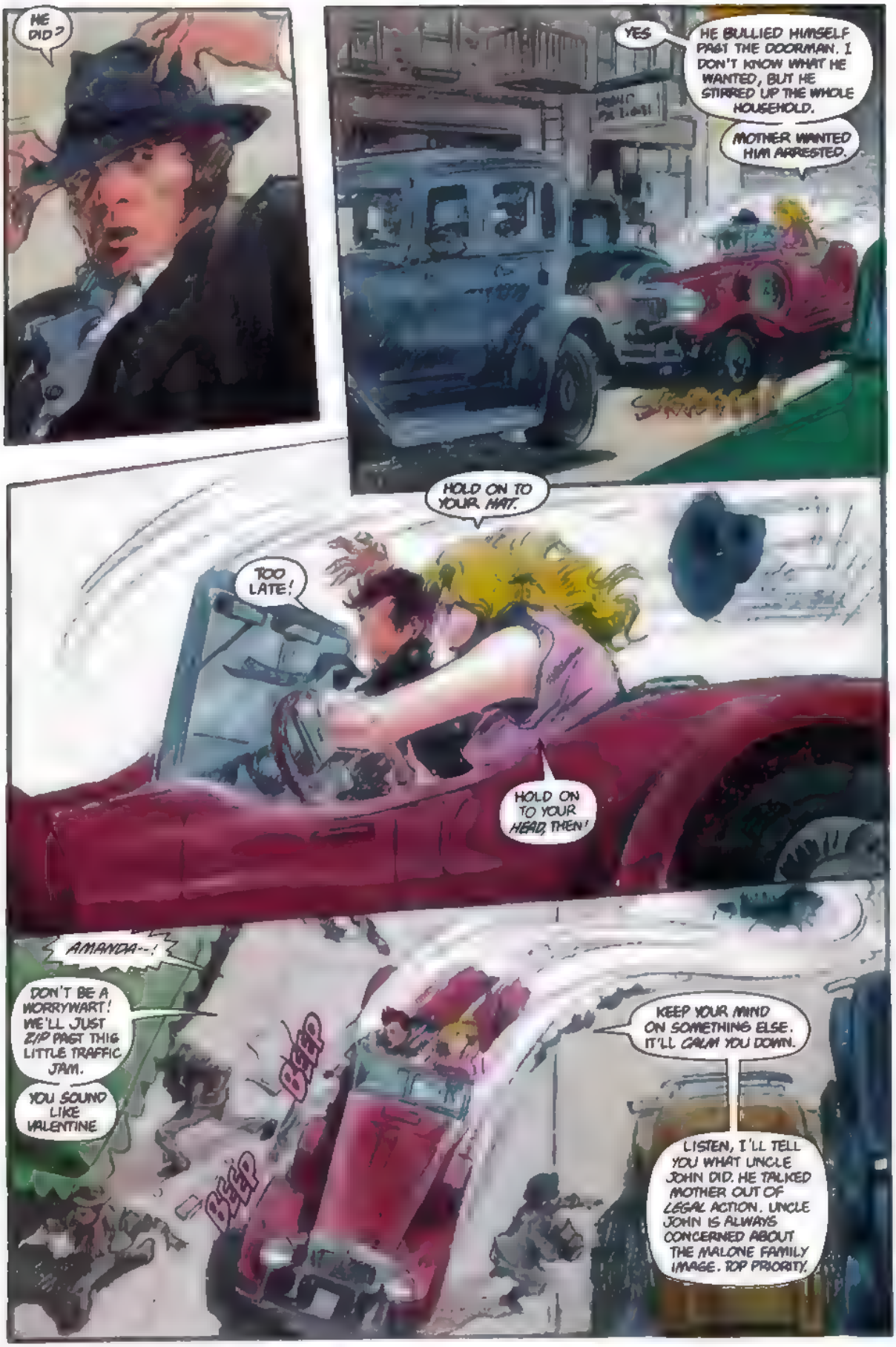
YEAH, TILL YOU HAVE BULLETS RIPPING UP YOUR WINGSPREAD, AND YOU SEE THE FRENCH LANDSCAPE RUSHING UP TO MEET YOU.
TEACHES YOU NEVER TO TAKE A PLANE FOR GRANTED.
BRAD'S EYES WERE DARK WITH MEMORIES OF TORN AND BURNING METAL.
THE BRIGHT AFTERNOON LIGHT SHOWED LINES AND FATIGUE UNDER THE PILOT'S PEPPY MANNER.
COME ON, MR. DUSK!
HERE'S SOME GOGGLES FOR YOU!
THE WATER HELD ONTO THE PLANE LIKE A MAGNET TO METAL. I COULD FEEL IT BUMPING AND RUSHING UNDER US. A DARK CURRENT OF WARM CITY WATER. FOR SOME REASON, IT REMINDED ME OF SKINNY-DIPPING WHEN I WAS A KID.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN SEEING BRAD AGAIN THAT SENT MY MIND BACKWARDS.
IT WAS BETTER THAN REMEMBERING JOYCE DEAD. OR LITTLE LIZZIE.
AND SUDDENLY, THE DARK CURRENT DID REMIND ME OF THEM AND OF INEXORABLE DEATH.
AND THEN, THE PLANE BROKE FREE FROM ITS GRIP--
--AND WE WERE AIRBORNE!
THE FIRST UPWARD SWOOP SUCKED OUR STOMACHS IN, LIKE A FIST HAD SQUEEZED TIGHT.

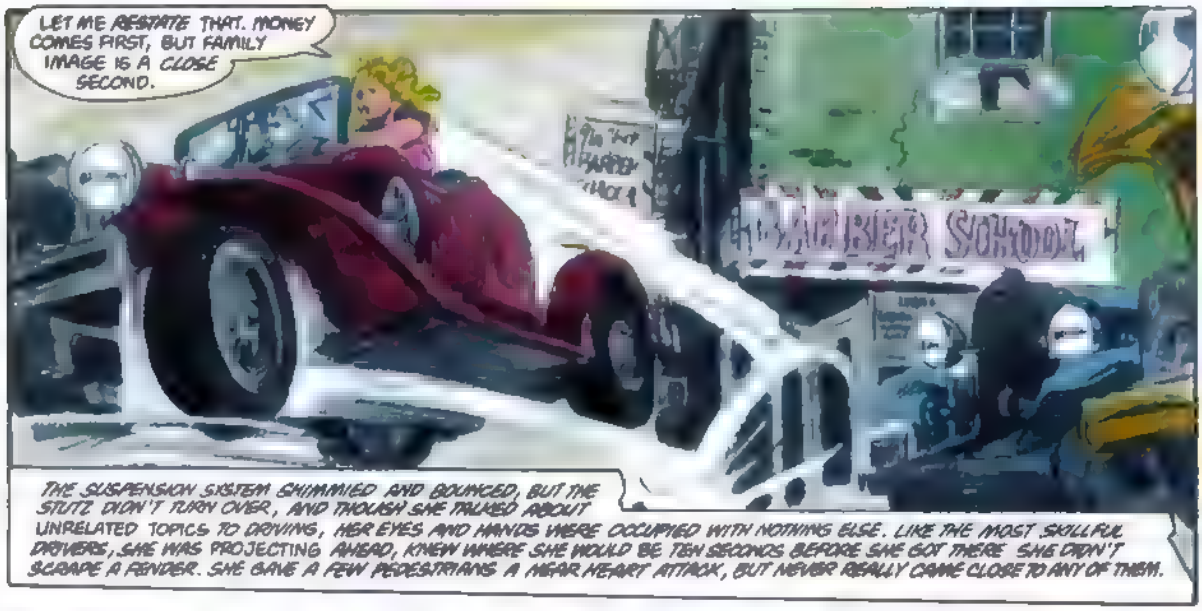
VALENTINE TRIED TO APPEAR CONFIDENT, ALMOST AS IF HE WERE ATTEMPTING TO EMULATE JOHN MALONE.
I FOUND IT AMUSING THAT HE WOULD SUBCONSCIOUSLY TRY TO BE LIKE A MAN HE THOUGHT HE HATED.
I'M GOING TO TAKE AMANDA UP SOON. ON THE 4TH.
WHERE TO?
CONEY ISLAND.
WE'LL FLY OUT THERE FOR THE MALONE FAMILY OUTING.
IT'LL BE MOBBED OUT THERE ON THE 4TH.
YES. BUT AMANDA ENJOYS RUBBING ELBOWS WITH ALL THE MERRY MAKERS.
AND SHE LOVES TO RIDE ALL THE RIDES. THE WONDER WHEEL, ALL THAT STUFF THAT MAKES YOU LOSE YOUR STOMACH.
NOT MAKING YOU NERVOUS, AM I?
NOT A BIT.
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO THIS. EVER SINCE SEEING CHESTER LOCKLEAR IN "THE SKYWAYMAN."
OR HOW ABOUT "WINGS"? YOU EVER SEE "WINGS"?
YES.

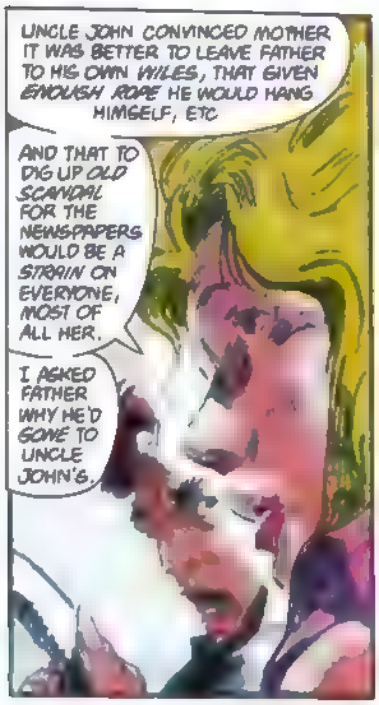
WHAT'D YOU THINK?
IT LET YOU KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE OUT THERE IN A CRACKERBOX, THE WIND TRYING TO TUG THE FLESH OFF YOUR FACE.
IT WAS REAL.
MIND IF I TAKE OVER FOR A SPELL?
SURE. SHOW ME HOW THE OLD GUYS DO IT
YOU DON'T EVER WANT TO BE IN A FLAMING SAND. THE ONLY THING IT GIVES YOU IS A HOT ASS!
AH, I COULD HANDLE IIIIIIT!
AND FLAMING SANDS!
YOU KNOW, MR. PUSK, I EVEN LIKE THE PHONY STUFF - UFF - UFF - UFF YOU EVER READ G-8 AND HIS BATTLE ACES?
NO, WHAT'S THAT?
A A...A PULP MAG...MAGAZINE. GREAT STUFF! FULL OF... FLYING HOLES...AND WHITE HOT DEATH...
GEEZ, TAKE IT EASY, WILLIE? THEY'VE GOT REGULA-TIONS THESE DAYS, YOU KNOW. THEY COULD REALLY GIVE US THE BUSINESS.
I COULD HAVE USED THIS BABY ONE NIGHT BACK IN FEBRUARY.
COUPLE OF GUYS TRIED TO THROW ME OFF THAT LEDGE THERE ON THE EMPIRE STATE.
AFTER CROWNSHIELD CALLING ME "KID" ALL DAY, AND JOHN MALONE REFERRING TO ME AS "YOUNG MAN," IT DIDN'T BOTHER ME AT ALL TO BE LABELED AS AN "OLD GUY"

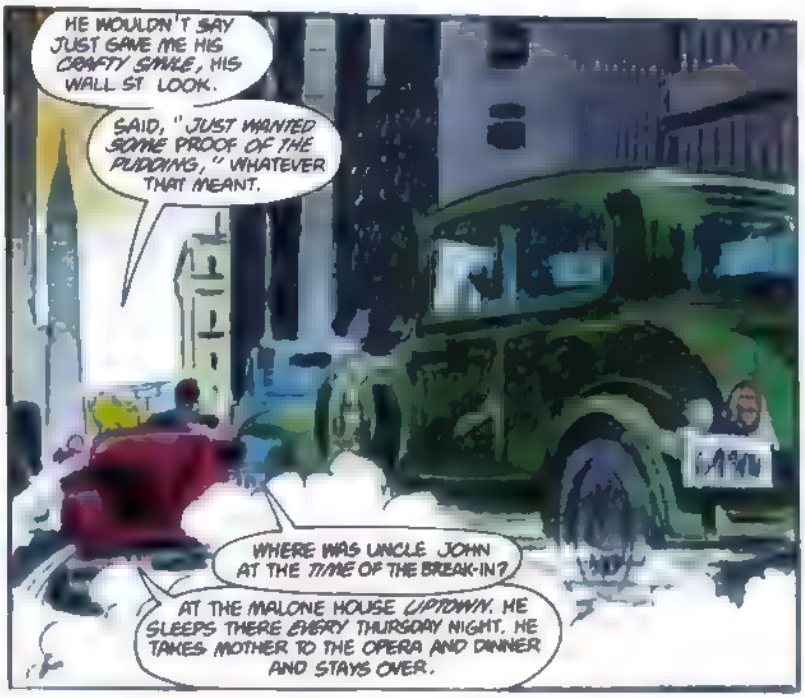

ARE YOU KIDDING?
YOU ARE KIDDING?
YOU'RE NOT KIDDING!
JUST THINKING ABOUT IT GETS MY ADRENALINE GOING AGAIN.
NOW COME?
MY.. MY ADRENALINES GOING RIGHT NOW.
YOU KNOW, I FIND MYSELF REMEMBERING WHAT RACED THROUGH MY BRAIN THAT NIGHT AS I STARED DOWN AT THE STREETS, MAYBE A HUNDRED STORIES BELOW. REMEMBER THAT FEELING AT THE COOLEST TIMES.
HAVE TO CATCH MYSELF AND THROW THE MEMORY OUT.
YOU DON'T, YOU'D NEVER CLIMB ABOVE THE THIRD FLOOR AGAIN.
ACTUALLY, I GUESS I HAVE A LOT OF MEMORIES I KEEP TRYING TO TOSS OUT.
UMM-UMM-UMM-UGH-LISTEN, I...I THINK IT'S TIME TO GO BACK.
ALREADY?
I WANT SOME TIME TO RECOVER MY APPETITE.


HERE THEY COME NOW, MISS AMANDA, BACK FROM THE WILD BLUE YONDER.
NATHAN!
MR. HOLBECK TOLD ME YOU WERE HERE.
AFTERNOON, DARLING!
VAL, YOU WON'T MIND TERRIBLY IF I BREAK OUR LUNCHEON DATE, WILL YOU?
I SIMPLY MUST TALK TO MR. DUSK.
OF COURSE. YOU RUN ALONG. I'VE LOST MY DESIRE FOR FOOD, ANYHOW
I'LL COVER FOR YOU WITH AUGUSTA IF SHE ASKS WHERE YOU ARE
THANKS FOR THE SPIN BRAD, I'LL TRY TO STOP BY SOON, TRADE OLD TIMES.
WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT?
YOU LOST MY FATHER, DIDN'T YOU?
HOW'D YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT? I WASN'T HIDING IT FROM YOU, BUT WE HAVEN'T TALKED SINCE FRIDAY. THAT'S WHEN HE DUCKED OUT ON ONE OF MY OPERATIVES.
24TH AVE
AMANDA DIDN'T WASTE ANY TIME PULLING OUT INTO TRAFFIC. SHE WAS IMPETUOUS, BUT SKILLED, AND EVEN WHEN I WAS AFRAID WE WOULD CRASH, THERE WAS ANOTHER PART OF ME THAT SUSPECTED THE STUTZ DIDN'T DARE GO OUT OF CONTROL.
FATHER WASN'T VERY SURREPTITIOUS. HE WENT TO MY UNCLE JOHN'S HOUSE, IN GRAMERCY PARK HE WENT VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING.

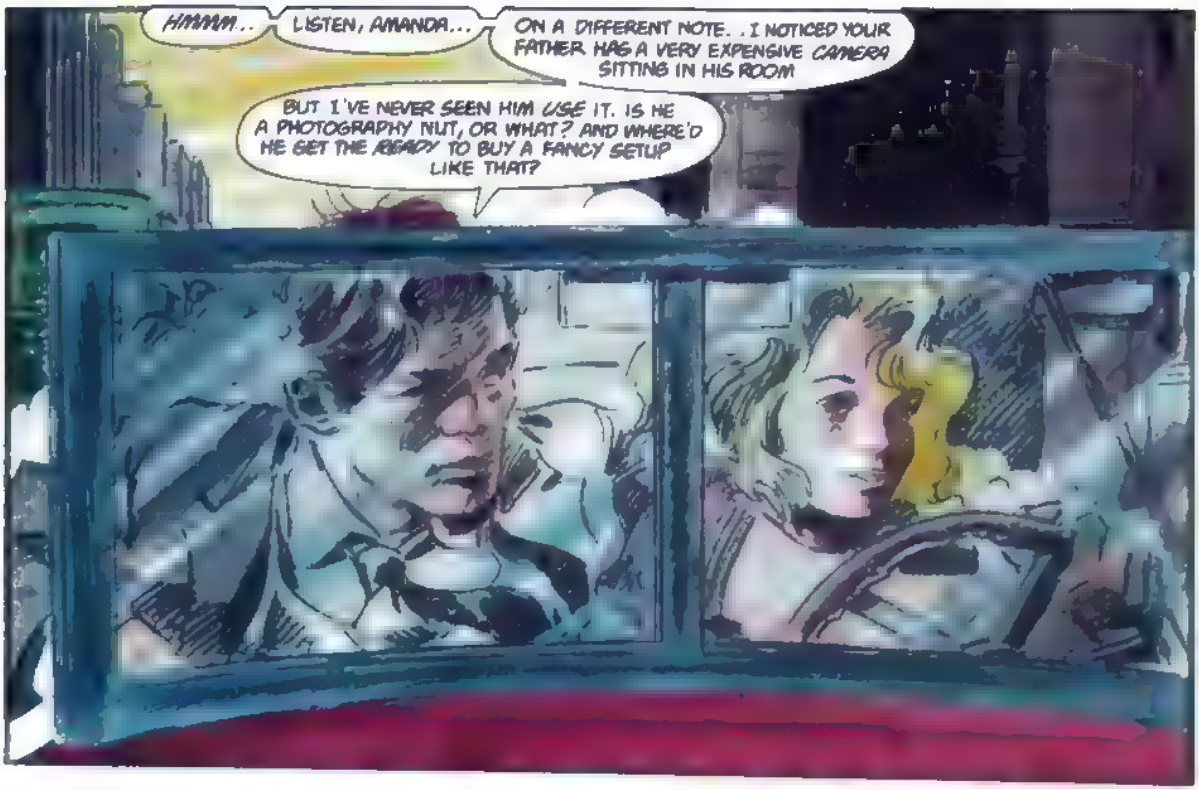

HE DID?
YES
HE BULLIED HIMSELF PAST THE DOORMAN. I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE WANTED, BUT HE STIRRED UP THE WHOLE HOUSEHOLD.
MOTHER WANTED HIM ARRESTED.
HOLD ON TO YOUR HAT.
TOO LATE!
HOLD ON TO YOUR HEAD, THEN!
AMANDA--!
DON'T BE A WORRYWART! WE'LL JUST ZIP PAST THIS LITTLE TRAFFIC JAM.
YOU SOUND LIKE VALENTINE
BEEP
BEEP
KEEP YOUR MIND ON SOMETHING ELSE. IT'LL CALM YOU DOWN.
LISTEN, I'LL TELL YOU WHAT UNCLE JOHN DID. HE TALKED MOTHER OUT OF LEGAL ACTION. UNCLE JOHN IS ALWAYS CONCERNED ABOUT THE MALONE FAMILY IMAGE. TOP PRIORITY.


LET ME ALLEVIATE THAT. MONEY COMES FIRST, BUT FAMILY IMAGE IS A CLOSE SECOND.
THE SUSPENSION SYSTEM SHIMMIED AND BOUNCED, BUT THE STUTZ DIDN'T TURN OVER, AND THOUGH SHE TALKED ABOUT UNRELATED TOPICS TO DRIVING, HER EYES AND HANDS WERE OCCUPIED WITH NOTHING ELSE. LIKE THE MOST SKILLFUL DRIVERS, SHE WAS PROJECTING AHEAD, KNEW WHERE SHE WOULD BE TEN SECONDS BEFORE SHE GOT THERE. SHE DIDN'T SCRAPE A FENDER. SHE GAVE A FEW PEDESTRIANS A NEAR HEART ATTACK, BUT NEVER REALLY CAME CLOSE TO ANY OF THEM.


UNCLE JOHN CONVINCED MOTHER IT WAS BETTER TO LEAVE FATHER TO HIS OWN WILES, THAT GIVEN ENOUGH ROPE HE WOULD HANG HIMSELF, ETC.
AND THAT TO DIG UP OLD SCANDAL FOR THE NEWSPAPERS WOULD BE A STRAIN ON EVERYONE, MOST OF ALL HER.
I ASKED FATHER WHY HE'D GONE TO UNCLE JOHN'S.

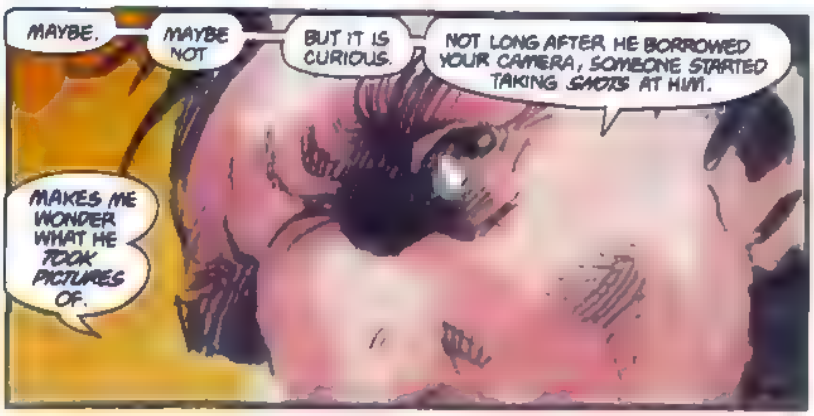

HE WOULDN'T SAY JUST GAVE ME HIS CRAFTY SMILE, HIS WALL ST LOOK.
SAID, "JUST WANTED SOME PROOF OF THE PUDDING," WHATEVER THAT MEANT.
WHERE WAS UNCLE JOHN AT THE TIME OF THE BREAK-IN?
AT THE MALONE HOUSE UPTOWN. HE SLEEPS THERE EVERY THURSDAY NIGHT. HE TAKES MOTHER TO THE OPERA AND DINNER AND STAYS OVER.

IT'S AN ARRANGEMENT THEY'VE HAD FOR YEARS, EVEN WHEN MOTHER WAS MARRIED TO DAD. AND IT DIDN'T CHANGE WHEN SHE GOT HER NEW HUSBAND, HAROLD.
SO, THEN CRANSTON KNEW YOUR UNCLE WOULDN'T BE HOME FRIDAY MORNING. AND HE PURPOSE-FULLY CHOSE TO GO THERE WHEN YOUR UNCLE WAS AWAY.
UNDOUBTEDLY.


HMMM..
LISTEN, AMANDA...
ON A DIFFERENT NOTE.. I NOTICED YOUR FATHER HAS A VERY EXPENSIVE CAMERA SITTING IN HIS ROOM
BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM USE IT. IS HE A PHOTOGRAPHY NUT, OR WHAT? AND WHERE'D HE GET THE READY TO BUY A FANCY SETUP LIKE THAT?

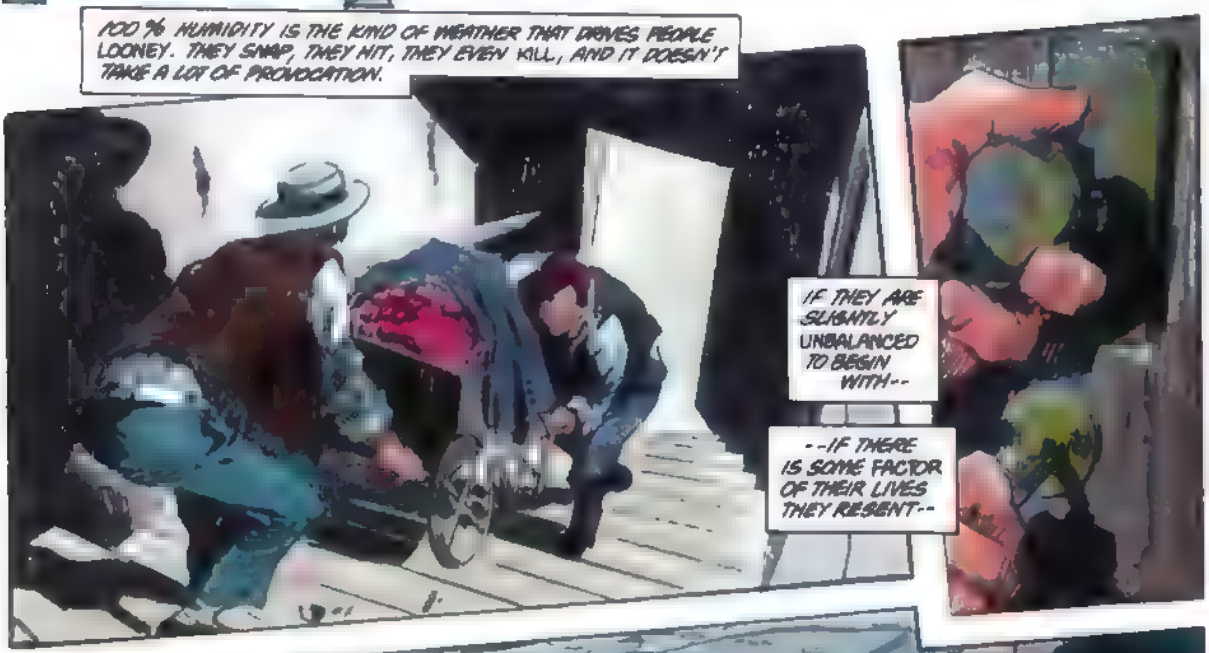
HE DIDN'T NEED ANY MONEY. THE CAMERA'S MINE!
YOURS?
YES. HE ASKED TO BORROW IT BUT TO TELL THE TRUTH I'VE NEVER KNOWN HIM TO HAVE ANY INTEREST IN TAKING PICTURES UNTIL HE ASKED ME IF HE COULD HAVE IT FOR AWHILE.

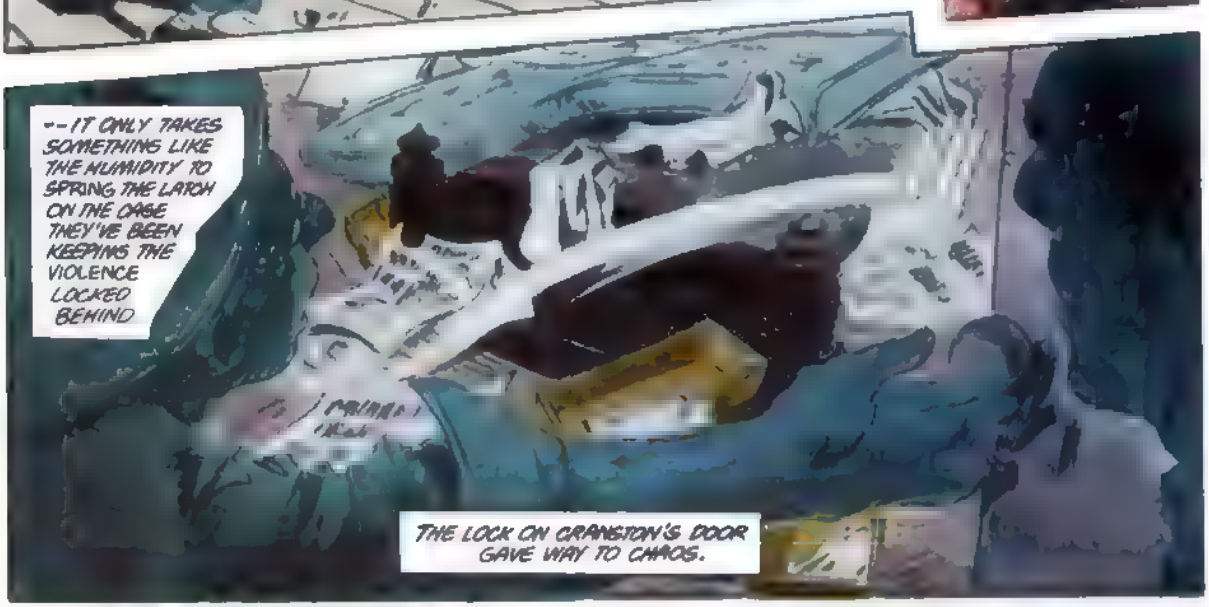
WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN? I MEAN, WHEN HE ASKED YOU FOR THE CAMERA?
OH, I DON'T REMEMBER, EXACTLY. SOMETIME THE BEGINNING OF JUNE.
HMM.
DOES THAT MEAN SOMETHING?


MAYBE.
MAYBE NOT
BUT IT IS CURIOUS.
NOT LONG AFTER HE BORROWED YOUR CAMERA, SOMEONE STARTED TAKING SHOTS AT HIM.
MAKES ME WONDER WHAT HE TOOK PICTURES OF.

FRIDAY JUNE 29, 1984

BY 1:00 IN THE AFTERNOON THE THERMOMETER HIT 97°. THE HUMIDITY WAS AT 100%.
IT FELT LIKE LIVING INSIDE A DOG'S MOUTH, JUST UNDER THE TONGUE. BREATHING WAS AN UNSAVORY ACT AKIN TO INHALING WARM SALIVA.


100% HUMIDITY IS THE KIND OF WEATHER THAT DRIVES PEOPLE LOONEY. THEY SNAP, THEY HIT, THEY EVEN KILL, AND IT DOESN'T TAKE A LOT OF PROVOCATION.
IF THEY ARE SUBTLY UNBALANCED TO BEGIN WITH--
--IF THERE IS SOME FACTOR OF THEIR LIVES THEY RESENT--


--IT ONLY TAKES SOMETHING LIKE THE HUMIDITY TO SPRING THE LATCH ON THE CAGE THEY'VE BEEN KEEPING THE VIOLENCE LOCKED BEHIND
THE LOCK ON CRANSTON'S DOOR GAVE WAY TO CHAOS.

AFTER HIS INITIAL SHOCKED REACTION, CRANSTON'S FACE CHANGED. HE LOOKED AS IF HE HAD FIGURED OUT SOMETHING HE HAD NOT ANTICIPATED--

--BUT NOW THAT HE HAD, FOUND IT AMUSING.

IT WAS THE SLY LOOK OF A WOLF WHO KNOWS HE HAS TRICKED THE FLOCK OF SHEEP INTO BECOMING DINNER.

DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THEY *MISSED* MUCH OF ANYTHING. YOUR DAUGHTER'S CAMERA IS SMASHED TO SMITHEREENS.

MUST HAVE *SCARED* HELL OUT OF THE COCKROACHES.

IT WAS INCREDIBLE THAT THE WRECKERS HAD BEEN ABLE TO SUMMON UP SUCH ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM WHEN THE ROOM WAS LIKE AN OVEN SET TO ROAST THOSE SHEEP CRANSTON SAW IN HIS WOLF-LIKE EYES.

THE *PRESSURE* IS ON, KID!

I HAD BEEN THINKING OF WOLVES AND SHEEP, BUT CRANSTON HAD ANOTHER ANIMAL ANALOGY, ONE PERHAPS MORE APPLICABLE TO THE SITUATION.

THE HOUNDS THOUGHT THEY HAD THE FOX, BUT I THINK NOW THEY KNOW BETTER.

WHAT THEY FOUND OUT IS THAT THE FOX IS AHEAD OF THEM, *ALL* THE WAY.

FEW MORE DAYS, KID, I'D SAY YOU'RE GOING TO BE *OUT* OF A JOB.

FUNNY THING IS, I *MIGHT* EVEN *MISS* YOU A BIT. AIN'T *THAT* A KICK?

SUNDAY JULY 1, 1934
I DROPPED OFF JOYCE'S KIDS AND I SCURRIED FOR REFUGE FROM THE HUMIDITY AT THE CAPITOL MOVIE EMPORIUM, WHERE THEY WERE PLAYING SOME LIGHTHEARTED MYSTERY CALLED "THE THIN MAN," WITH MYRNA LOY AND WILLIAM POWELL
BUT MYRNA LOY JUST REMINDED ME OF JOYCE'S ABSENCE--
--AND POWELL TOLD ME STRAIGHT OUT THAT NOT ONLY WAS I NOT DAPPER, BUT THAT I NEVER WOULD BE.
BEFORE THE FEATURE, DUKE ELLINGTON HAD BEEN UP ON THE STAGE WITH "SNAKE HIPS" TUCKER--
--BUT EVEN THOSE TWO GIANTS FAILED TO LIVEN MY SPIRITS.
IN THE PROJECTOR-LIT DARK, TONY'S BLEAK EYES LOOKED HOSTILE.
--AS IF HE, TOO, WERE PLAGUED BY DEMONS THAT THE FILM IMAGES COULD NOT BANISH.
GITCHA ARM OFF'A MY SEAT!
I CAN PUT MY ARM UP THERE IF I WANT.
NO, YOU CAN'T!
WHY NOT?
I DON'T WANT IT THERE.
SO WHAT?

SEW BUTTONS ON YOUR MOTHER'S UNDERWEAR.
YOU BETTER NOT SAY THAT!
TRY 'N STOP ME!
WHUCK!
THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT REALIZED TONY WAS DARING ME TO HIT HIM.
THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT WANTED TO DO IT.
NO MORE! YOU GOT THAT, TONY? YOU KEEP YOUR TRAP ZIPPED AND YOUR MITTS TO YOURSELF.
SOLVE THIS ONE, NICK AND NORA. TELL AN UNDERWORLD, UNRICH PRIVATE DICK HOW HE SHOULD HANDLE SEVEN-YEAR-OLD HATE.
MONDAY JULY 2, 1934
UTOMAT
JULY IS A KILLER MONTH IN THE CITY THAT MAKES ONE YEARN FOR THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF JUNE
IN THOSE SECONDS BEFORE THE MACHINE GUN STUTTER [illegible] THROUGH THE AFTERNOON CITY SOUNDS--
--OF CAR HORNS AND INDISTINCT CHATTER--
--I HAD BEEN THINKING WHAT A BORING DAY IT WAS--
--AND FEELING SORRY FOR MYSELF AND MY BURNING, ACHING FEET.
I SAW THE MUZZLE SECONDS BEFORE IT FIRED. I OPENED MY MOUTH TO SHOUT, BUT THE STACCATO OF THE WEAPON MADE THE FIRST SOUND.

I LOST SIGHT OF THE CHOPPER, BUT STILL HEARD ITS LETHAL ROAR, LIKE A RIVETER'S DRILL TEARING UP THE WORLD!
I WENT LOW--
--BANGING MY ELBOW ON THE SIDEWALK.
THE PAIN SEIZED ME, PARALYZINGLY
FOR THREE OR FOUR SECONDS THAT ELBOW WAS MY WHOLE LIFE, SCREAMING PAIN MESSAGES.
I IGNORED ITS INSISTENT DEMANDS!
MY FINGERS CLOSED ABOUT MY GUN.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I EXPECTED TO DO WITH IT!
FAT CHANCE. I COULD SHOOT A CHOPPER OUT OF THE ROOMAN'S HANDS WHILE HE WAS IN A MOVING CAR!
I SUPPOSE I COULD HAVE MANAGED TO PUT A BULLET THROUGH THE REAR WINDOW INTO THE CHOPPER'S FACE.
BITS OF APPLE-SHRAPNEL FELL ON ME.
AND SOMETHING ELSE.

SOMETHING LIQUID
SOMETHING WET.
BLOOD!
CRANSTON'S BLOOD!
I DIDN'T HAVE TO CHECK FOR A PULSE.
I DIDN'T HAVE TO ASK HIM IF HE WAS "OKAY."
JUST LIKE I HADN'T HAD TO ASK ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT JOYCE.
THOSE SONS OF BITCHES!
SWEET LORD JESUS! THE NUT'S GOT A GUN!
THE AMOUNT OF WOUNDS AND THE BLOOD GAVE DEFINITE ANSWERS.
NO AMBIGUITY. NO OPTIONS.
I WANTED TO TAKE A SHOT, MY HAND WAS TREMBLING WITH THE DESIRE FOR THAT SHOT, BUT THE CROWDS BEGAN MILLING AROUND, THE BACKS OF FRAIL HEADS DRIFTING IN AND OUT OF MY GUNSIGHTS.
HEY, YOU MANIAC! WHAT THE HELL YOU DOING WITH THAT THING?
LET GO!
YOU'RE LETTING THEM GET AWAY!
I KNEW THE GUY THOUGHT HE WAS DOING THE RIGHT THING.
A LOT OF OTHERS WOULD NOT HAVE INTERFERED

THEY HEADED UP 42ND ST. THE DROPPER STARED BACK AT ME, HIS DEAD BLACK EYES LIT BY THE FLAME OF THE CHOPPER.
THE BULLETS WEREN'T COMING CLOSE. THERE WAS TOO MUCH MOTION IN THE CAR FOR HIM TO AIM ACCURATELY.
MY ONLY HOPE IN CATCHING UP TO THEM WAS THAT THIS WAS THE LUNCH-TIME HOUR, THE NOON-ESCAPE, AND THAT THE TRAFFIC IN THE TIMES SQUARE AREA COULD BE A BITCH, EVEN BEFORE NOON.
WHOEVER THEY WERE, THEY HAD NO COMPUNCTION ABOUT KILLING. A PEDESTRIAN STOOD ROOTED IN FRONT OF THEM, LIKE A RABBIT CAUGHT IN HEADLIGHTS AT NIGHT--
--AND THERE WAS A TERRIBLE WHACK, OF FLESH AND BROKEN BONE AND DENTED METAL--
--AND THEN HE WAS LYING IN THEIR WAKE--
--DEAD!

THERE WAS MOANING / SCREAMING / CONFUSION / FEAR / THE SMELL OF GUNFIRE.

IT WAS THE GREAT WAR ALL OVER AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME ON CONCRETE RATHER THAN AIR AND TURF.

TIMES SQUARE WAS ALL BILLBOARDS AND CITY PROMISES--

--WITH FURIOUS MOVEMENT BENEATH THEM FROM PEOPLE WHO NO LONGER SAW THE ADS OR BELIEVED THE PROMISES.

THE HORSE HAD BEEN PULLING A PRODUCE WAGON THAT MADE MIDTOWN DELIVERIES.

WHEN THE GETAWAY CAR SCREECHED ONTO BROADWAY, THE ANIMAL WAS SPRAWLED ACROSS THE LANES, FELLED BY A COMBINATION OF UNRELENTING SUN, CONCRETE THAT HELD THE HEAT LIKE A JEALOUS LOVER, AND THE HOT CARBON MONOXIDE OF CAR EXHAUSTS.

THE HORSE STRUGGLED AGAINST THE HEAT AND HARNESS. ITS BREATHING WAS RAW AND RAGGED, THE FINAL GASPINGS OF LUNGS UNABLE TO GET ENOUGH AIR, WITH A PANICKY MOAN BORNE DEEP IN ITS THROAT THAT SPOKE OF THE NEARNESS OF DEATH.

I WAS HALF A BLOCK BEHIND, AND LOSING GROUND FAST, WHEN I SAW THE CAR SUDDENLY VEER. A HYDRANT ERUPTED!
I HAD NOT YET SEEN THE HORSE, BUT I HEARD THE CRASH.
I PUSHED MYSELF TO RUN FASTER. MY BODY FELT LIKE A RADIATOR THREATENING TO BOIL OVER.
THE ONLY REASON I COULD FIGURE FOR THE CRASH WAS THAT THE DRIVER HAD LOST HIS NERVE.
OUT OF THE WAY! GET OUT OF THE WAY!
WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?
GOT ME
RAGE LEAPT IN ME LIKE FLAME CATCHING DRY GRASS
I'VE GOT A GOD-DAMNED CHANCE TO CATCH THEM!
THE GAWKERS HAD STOOD IN THE MIDDLE OF ONE OF THE MOST SOPHISTICATED STREET-CORNERS IN THIS METROPOLIS TO MUSE ABOUT THE ODDITY OF A HORSE'S DEATH.
SOME MEN HAD BEEN THROWING BUCKETS OF WATER OVER THE HORSE. IT WAS TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE!
I WAS HUFFING AND PUFFING AND STRAINING--
--AND IF I'D HAD ANY DAMNED SENSE I'D HAVE LAIN DOWN BESIDE THE HORSE AND CALLED IT A DAY!

COMIN' THROUGH!
MOVE YOUR ASS, BUDDY!
TAKE THE NEXT BUS, MISTER THIS ONE'S FULL UP!
I COULD ONLY CATCH GLIMPSES OF THEM AS THEY RAN UP 43RD ST., CROSSING 6TH AVENUE AND HEADING TOWARD 5TH.
THE DROPPER'S BROAD BACK AND JAGGED SPIKED-UP HAIR MADE HIM LOOK LIKE A FULLBACK WHO HAD BEEN SENT TO THE ELECTRIC CHAIR FOR TRAMPLING THE OPPOSING TEAM TO DEATH.
THE HAIR WAS STIFF, STATIC, AS IF IT WERE THE ONLY PART OF HIM THAT COULD FEEL THE VOLTAGE IF SUCH A SWITCH
AT 5TH AVENUE, THEY CHARGED THROUGH A LINE OF HOT, WEARY COMMUTERS WHO WERE CLIMBING ABOARD A 5TH AVENUE DOUBLE DECKER BUS.
I WAS GOING TO LOSE THEM!
MY HEART WAS TRYING TO SLAM ITS WAY OUT OF MY CHEST.
I SOUNDED LIKE THE DYING HORSE.
I GAVE IT ONE LAST, DESPERATE TRY, LUNGING FOR THE REAR DOOR HANDLES AS THE BUS SPED BY. MY FEET WHIPPED OUT FROM UNDER ME, SCRAPING ALONG THE STREET.
THE DROPPER'S EYES UNDER THE ELECTROCUTED HAIRLINE WERE HARD.
CHK-
CHK-CHK-CHK!
THEY WERE EYES THAT WERE USED TO LOOKING AT THINGS THEY WERE GOING TO KILL!

BULLETS RIPPED THROUGH THE DOOR.

JAGGED CHUNKS OF METAL HURLED PAST MY BODY, A HARSH REMINDER THAT MY BODY--

--WAS LESS THAN IMPERVIOUS.

THERE WERE TWO CHOICES: UP OR DOWN.

I CLIMBED UPWARD, MY BODY FEELING HEAVY AND EARTHBOUND--

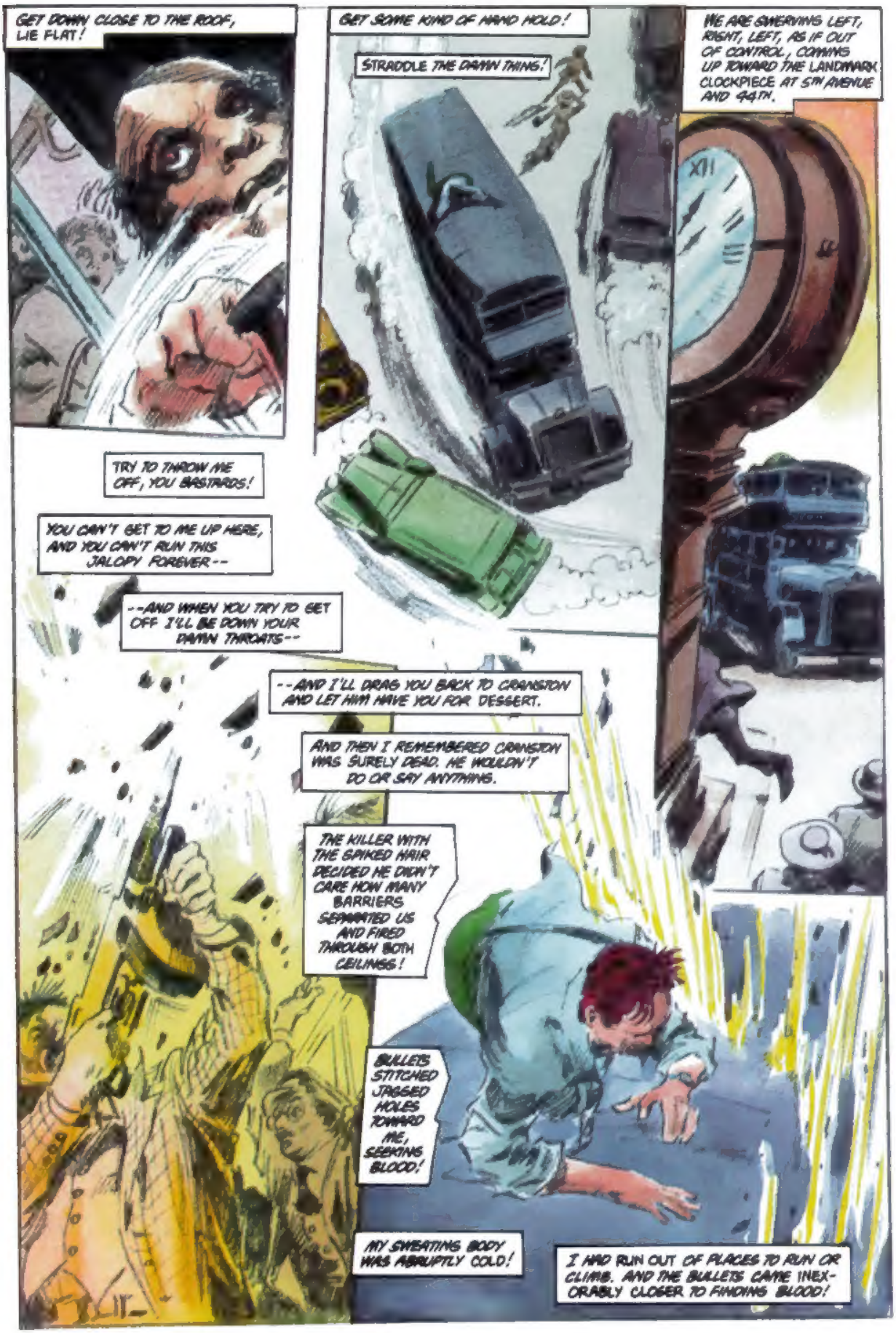
--WHILE THE MACHINE GUN ROARED WITHOUT PAUSE--

--BULLETS RACING UP THE REAR WALL, TEARING HOLES IN METAL MY FEET HAD BEEN SCRABBLING OVER SECONDS BEFORE.

THE DRIVER MADE A U-TURN ON 5TH AVENUE.

WE WERE HEADING BACK UPTOWN. 5TH AVENUE TRAFFIC RUNS DOWNTOWN, ONE WAY!

I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH CHANCE TO WORRY ABOUT HEADING INTO ON-COMING TRAFFIC, I WAS TOO BUSY TRYING NOT TO FALL OFF INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET.


GET DOWN CLOSE TO THE ROOF, LIE FLAT!
GET SOME KIND OF HAND HOLD!
STRADDLE THE DAMN THING!
WE ARE SWERVING LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, AS IF OUT OF CONTROL, COMING UP TOWARD THE LANDMARK CLOCKPIECE AT 5TH AVENUE AND 44TH.
TRY TO THROW ME OFF, YOU BASTARDS!
YOU CAN'T GET TO ME UP HERE, AND YOU CAN'T RUN THIS JALOPY FOREVER--
--AND WHEN YOU TRY TO GET OFF I'LL BE DOWN YOUR DAMN THROATS--
--AND I'LL DRAG YOU BACK TO CRANSTON AND LET HIM HAVE YOU FOR DESSERT.
AND THEN I REMEMBERED CRANSTON WAS SURELY DEAD. HE WOULDN'T DO OR SAY ANYTHING.
THE KILLER WITH THE SPIKED HAIR DECIDED HE DIDN'T CARE HOW MANY BARRIERS SEPARATED US AND FIRED THROUGH BOTH CEILINGS!
BULLETS STITCHED JAGGED HOLES TOWARD ME, SEEKING BLOOD!
MY SWEATING BODY WAS ABRUPTLY COLD!
I HAD RUN OUT OF PLACES TO RUN OR CLIMB. AND THE BULLETS CAME INEXORABLY CLOSER TO FINDING BLOOD!

GENE COLAN

has been illustrating comic books since the 1940's. He has worked for almost every major comic book company at one time or another. In the 1950's he worked for DC Comics, illustrating many of the romance and licensed titles, such as HOPALONG CASSIDY. More currently, he has penciled the Batman in DETECTIVE COMICS since 1981, and the 12-issue maxi-series JEMM, SON OF SATURN. With Don McGregor as writer, he has penciled both the NATHANIEL DUSK and NATHANIEL DUSK II mini-series, as well as RAGAMUFFINS. He also lives in New York City and is currently at work on Cary Bates' graphic novel adaptation of Robert Silverberg's novel NIGHTWINGS.

DON McGREGOR

has been steeping himself in New York City's history to prepare the adventures of Nathaniel Dusk for DC Comics' 4-issue mini-series NATHANIEL DUSK and NATHANIEL DUSK II. In addition to writing NATHANIEL DUSK for DC, he is the author of Eclipse Comics' DETECTIVES, INC; RAGAMUFFINS; and SABRE, the first U.S. "alternative" comics' graphic novel, which has since become an ongoing series. He has written the BLACK PANTHER and KILLRAVEN for Marvel Comics and is the author of two books: DRAGONFLAME and THE VARIABLE SYNDROME. He lives in New York City and is currently working on a new project for DC Comics: a 6-issue fantasy mini-series.

Photo: Albert DeGuzman

"The Private Detective story
has too rarely been translated well into the comics medium. NATHANIEL DUSK is one of those rare gems, combining a humanistic protagonist walking down some pretty mean streets with visuals supplied by the leading proponent of naturalistic art in comics—Gene Colan."

Dean Mullaney
Publisher, Eclipse Comics

"You manage to suggest so much more than you have space to write—background, feelings, conflicts, etc. They are certainly page-turners, and I'm not a reader who especially likes stories set in the past, the nostalgia bit, so keeping me turning and reading was a hell of a job of work."

Dennis Lynds (Michael Collins)
Author, the Dan Fortune Mysteries

"The P.I. form...is readily apparent in the storyline's gritty dialogue, moody 1930's setting, street level characterizations, and complex plotting....The tone is right. The mood is right. The feel is right. McGregor and Colan have good reason to be proud of their creation."

Paul Bishop
Editor, The Thieftaker Journals

CRIME / MYSTERY